

TWICE-A-MONTH

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Top-Notch Magazine

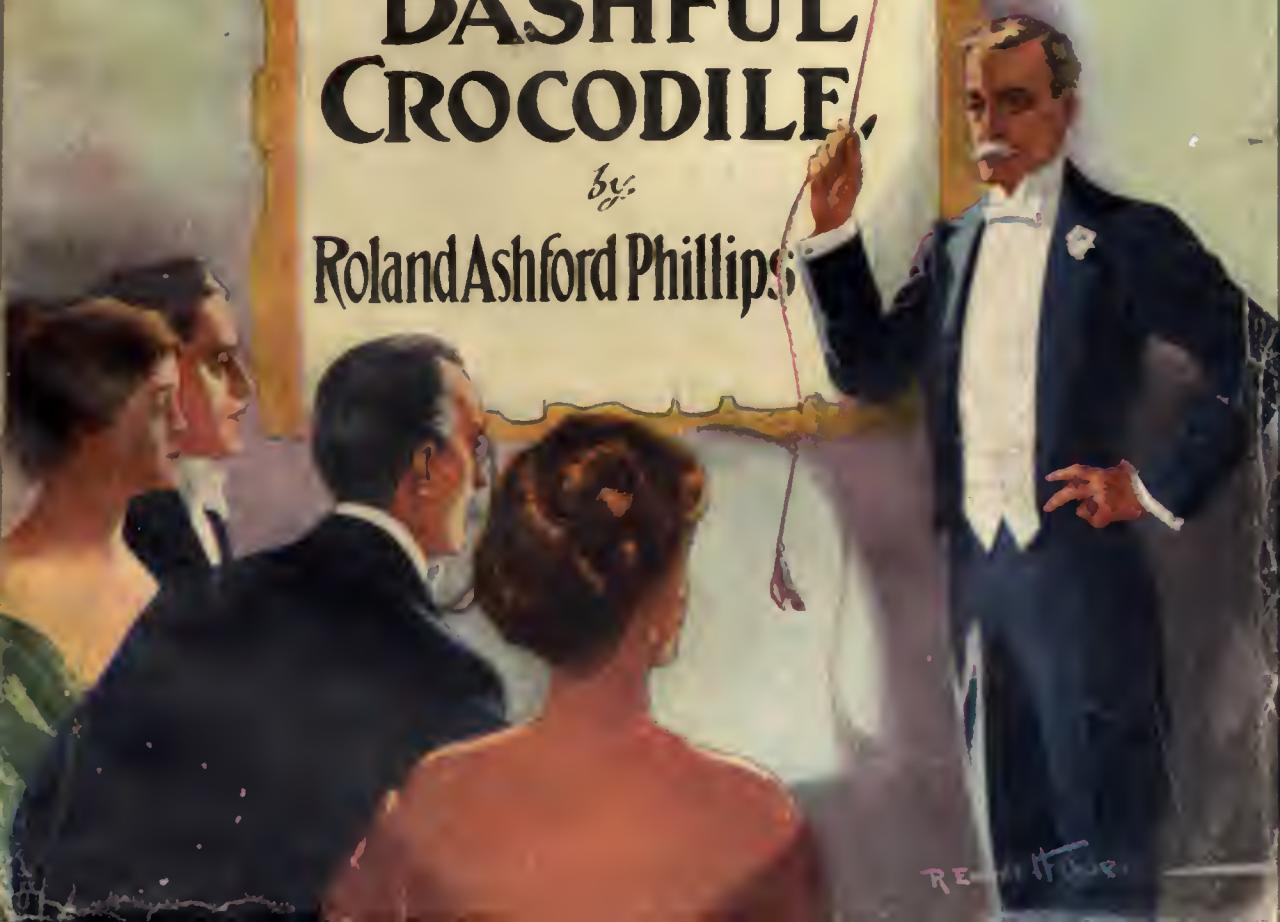
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by

Roland Ashford Phillips



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TOP-NOTCH

TWICE-A-MONTH MAGAZINE

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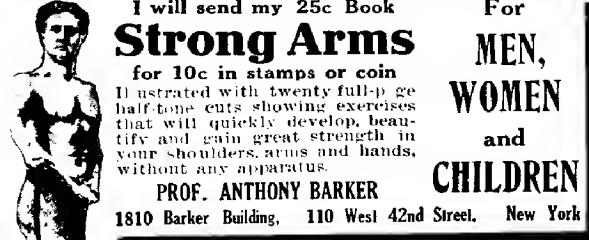
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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

VOL. XXII

Published May 1, 1915

No. 2

Tale of the Railroad and Express Service



(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

BOOTS FOR BARTON.



LARGE consignment of shoes had just been delivered at "The Emporium," as Long & McKenzie's general store in Burt City, Montana, was usually known, and Amos Long, the fat little senior partner, was standing in the doorway, watching one of his assistants unpacking the case of goods.

As the boxes were carried into the

store, one of them, considerably larger than the usual shoe box, dropped to the ground, and out fell a pair of heavy-soled tan bluchers with eighteen-inch tops. That they were a special order was certain.

Long picked up the shoes, and was admiring them when Arlo McKenzie, the other member of the firm, came to the door. It was only recently that McKenzie had bought a share in the business, and Long began explaining to him about these particular bluchers.

"They're for Tom Barton, at Dry Wash," he said. "For the last six years, regular, Barton has sent to The Emporium for a pair of them oak-sole, laced-knee contraptions. Funny how a man's got to have the same thing right along when he once gets stuck on it. Barton's got a ranch down here in charge of a foreman named Hoover, but he stays mostly up at Dry Wash himself. Him and his men are good customers of ours, Arlo, and we got to treat him white. Say, Jerry!" and Long turned to his assistant, "Put them tan bluchers in a box, wrap 'em secure, and send 'em by express prepaid to Barton, same's usual."

"Maybe I'd better do that," said McKenzie. "Things are sort of quiet in the store, and I can just as well attend to that as not."

McKenzie was a tall, meager-framed man, middle-aged, and looking at least ten years older than he really was. During the last week, Long had noticed that he seemed absent-minded; that his eyes had grown dull and his face haggard, just as though something was worrying him. This bothered Long a good deal, for his heart was kindly and he did not want to see his partner get under the weather and perhaps take to his bed.

"All right, Mac, maybe you'd better," said Long. "And that reminds me of another thing. Business is quiet, and if you'd like to go away for a couple o' weeks with Lois—fishing or something else—I guess The Emporium won't suffer. You're lookin' kind o' peaked the last few days. Go off somers and have a good time. Why not?"

McKenzie flashed a quick glance at his partner. "I'm all right, Amos," he answered, and he laughed lightly as he took the boots from Jerry. But it was a forced laugh, and Long knew McKenzie was far from being all right. However, he did not press the matter further.

McKenzie went into the storeroom

with the boots. Perhaps half an hour later he emerged with a package under his arm, and started for the express office. "Don't forget to send 'em prepaid," Long called after him, "and by express. Barton never uses parcel post much."

"I get you," answered McKenzie.

At the express office, Al Reeves, the driver, had just got back with a load of stuff from the station. He took the package handed over by McKenzie, looked at the address, and turned to the scales.

"Where's Summerfield, Al?" inquired McKenzie.

Summerfield was the express agent, and, for very good reasons which will appear later, an excellent friend of McKenzie's. Reeves was a freckle-faced, red-headed youngster, and he grinned widely as he answered: "He just saw some one go by, Mr. McKenzie, and went out to walk down the street with her a ways."

"Ah!" McKenzie murmured, and a glow came into his dark eyes. The sparkle vanished suddenly, and an expression of sorrow flashed into the thin face.

"This hugs six pounds mighty close," observed Reeves, "and if you want to prepay, it will cost you two bits."

"I want it to go prepaid," said McKenzie. "What's the method when you send a package prepaid, Al?" he inquired, exhibiting a sudden interest in the driver's work.

"Give you a receipt first," was the answer, and the driver proceeded to write one out with an indelible pencil. "Next," he went on, after exchanging the receipt for a quarter, which he dropped into the till, "I put on this yellow prepaid slip."

A pad of the slips lay on the counter, and he picked one off, drew it across a wet sponge, and slapped it on the parcel. "What's the value, Mr. McKenzie?" inquired Reeves.

"Not enough to mention," said the other. "It's way below fifty dollars, and the receipt calls for a valuation up to that amount in case the package is lost, doesn't it?"

"Right-o! Le'me have the receipt a minute."

He picked up a rubber stamp, pressed it upon an ink pad, and then brought it down hard on the piece of paper McKenzie had laid on the counter. "Value asked and not given," he remarked. "Notice? Now I'll just mark the pre-paid slip with the weight and the amount you paid." He suited his action to the word, marking a plain "6" in the space for the weight, and "25" in that for the amount. "There you have it," he finished. "Nothin' very complicated about that, huh?"

"Is that all there is to it?" queried McKenzie.

"Well," answered Reeves, "Joe Summerfield makes out the waybill."

"Is that complicated?"

"Easy as fallin' off a log. Say," said the driver obligingly, "I'll make out the waybill for this, just to help Joe out and show you how it's done."

He went back to a counter in the rear of the office, and returned with several yellow slips, probably two feet long and three and one-half inches wide.

"These are printed at both ends, see?" he continued. "In the middle there's a blank space. I fold the two printed ends over with a piece of carbon underneath. Timesavers, that's what. Here's the date—that goes on with a stamp." He used another stamp and the ink pad. "Then here's a stamp with 'Burt City, Montana' on it, and our block number. I use that, too. Now I fill in."

While Reeves was writing, McKenzie examined the last rubber stamp. "The two printed ends are torn off," the driver continued, "thusly." He wrenched the slip into three pieces. "This"—and he held up one printed end

— "is pasted on the package." Picking up a brush, he pushed it into the dextrin can and smeared the back of the bit of paper and smoothed it down on the package. "The middle piece we keep," he added, "and the other end goes with the bunch of waybills I hand to the messenger on the train. That's the whole of it, Mr. McKenzie."

The junior partner examined the package carefully, then laughed as he turned away. "Simple enough when you know how, Al," he remarked. "Much obliged for your trouble." He then went out of the office.

Reeves took the package and laid it on the floor by the stove with a number of other outgoing parcels. After that he went on unloading his wagon and making ready for his afternoon delivery.

"I ought to've told McKenzie," muttered Reeves, "that his package got in too late for Seventeen, and will have to lay over until to-morrow at eleven. But I reckon it don't make much difference. The package will be in Dry Wash to-morrow afternoon. Long & McKenzie are mighty good about givin' us stuff they could send by parcel post. Our business ain't fell off much with that firm."

Joe Summerfield came in presently with a smile you could have seen a block away, and walked into his cage. He was busy getting his office in shape for the traveling agent. This gentleman was supposed to drop in every three months, but he had a way of showing up at any old time.

"How's Lois, Joe?"

Summerfield looked up to see the grinning, impish face of the driver pressed against the cage wires. "Oh, you go chase yourself!" he laughed, and threw a paper weight.

About three o'clock that afternoon, while Summerfield was alone in the office and busy at his desk, he heard a sound behind him, and turned in his

swivel chair. The next moment he was on his feet, his face beaming. "Hello, Lois!" he cried. "Say, come in and sit down, can't you?"

A young woman had walked in behind the counter; a very pretty young woman she was, too, but her fair face wore rather a serious expression at that moment.

"I can only stop a second, Joe," she answered, "so I'll not come in and sit down. I want to ask you if—"

"You're not going away?" broke in Summerfield, noting a satchel in the girl's hand.

"Oh, no!" she said, and smiled. "I was just taking this to the store for father. Do you know any one named Lewis Ruthven?"

"Do I?" said the express agent, coming out of his private quarters. "Well, I should say so! He's from the East, Lois, and a mighty fine chap. He's out on a ranch near here—Barton's ranch, the one Hoover has charge of. Why? Are you acquainted with him?"

"No," she returned, "I never saw Mr. Ruthven. But I have a letter—it came only a little while ago—from my friend, Gwendolyn Arnold, of Albany, New York. She knows Mr. Ruthven, and she writes that she has asked him to call and see father and me."

"Your father must know him, Lois. Ruthven is in town quite often, and all the ranch trading is done at The Emporium."

"Then I'll ask father about him," she said, as she went through the gate at the end of the counter. "Going to work tonight, Joe?"

"I think so."

"Will I bother you if I drop in for a little while?"

"Will you bother me?" he scoffed. "Well, I should say not! But why the hurry?"

"I must be going on," she said, with

some constraint. "If Mr. Ruthven calls, I wish you could come with him, Joe."

"Maybe I can fix it, Lois; we'll see." And he walked with her to the door and watched her fondly as she moved off down the street. "Regular princess, that's what she is," he said to himself, as he returned to his work. "Never was another girl like her, and never will be. Wonder if it costs any more to keep an establishment of your own than to go on barely existing at a boarding house. I—well, it takes two to make a bargain. Wish this Gwendolyn Arnold had kept still about Ruthven. If a girl had to make a choice between him and me—" He did not finish that line of thought, but broke off with a frown.

Half an hour later, he began looking over the packages by the stove. When he picked up the package for Thomas Barton, he remembered Ruthven and gave the package some attention.

"Al must have taken this in," he said to himself. "He's got it marked for six pounds, and I'll eat my hat if he hasn't made a mistake." He weighed the parcel in his hands. "Sure he has!" he declared, and took it over to the package scales. It tipped the beam at just eight pounds. "One on Al," he said, grinning. "It won't go out until to-morrow, and I'll just put it in the storeroom and have some fun with that little runt."

Two hours later, Reeves came in to load the stuff for No. 8, eastbound. Summerfield immediately went for him. "You've got an education, Al?" Summerfield inquired.

"So-so," said the driver, a bit surprised. "I can figger rings all around you, although I ain't so cocky about it."

"See things straight, do you? Haven't got the blind staggers, or anything like that?"

"Not so'st you can notice it, you big windjammer! What's pestering your mind, huh? That's something I'll be hanged if I can see through. You must have taken a funny powder."

"Go out and buy me a cigar," ordered Summerfield; "a fat perfecto. Geigel has 'em, two for a quarter."

"Who says the cigars are on me?"

"I do. You took in a package for Barton, at Dry Wash, didn't you?"

"Yep. If you'd been attendin' to business instead of paradin' around with a skirt, I wouldn't have had to take it in."

"You marked that package six pounds."

"That's what it weighs in at. I remember it. Collected two bits from your father-in-law elect, Arlo McKenzie. Why?"

"It weighs eight pounds, son. Go into the storeroom and get it and see for yourself."

Reeves looked startled. Then he rushed for the storeroom and got the Barton package from a shelf by the window. Summerfield leaned against the counter with a complacent smile while Al laid the package on the scales. "Say, Joe," the driver whooped, "what you givin' me?"

"Eight pounds, eh?" queried Summerfield.

"No, six. Come and look."

The smile vanished from Summerfield's face, and his complacency disappeared. He went hurriedly to the scales, looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. The beam tilted at not quite six pounds. Next he looked at the package, blew the dust off the scales, and weighed the shipment very carefully for himself. He peered at the hilarious Reeves in astonishment.

"I weighed that package an hour or two ago," he declared, "and it weighed eight pounds!"

"Yes, you did!" cried Reeves. "Trouble with you is, Joe, Lois McKenzie has got you buffaloed. You don't know whether you're afoot or horseback, right side up or standin' on your head. Who buys from Geigel, huh? Who——"

The door opened, and some one

walked in. A cheery voice called: "Howdy, Summerfield!"

CHAPTER II.

CLEARING THE SITUATION.

RUTHVEN!" exclaimed the express agent, glad of the diversion. "Say, you're just the fellow I want to see!"

"Oh, no!" said Reeves jeeringly. "Ruthven's not the fellow you want to see, Joe. You want to see a doctor. You're pickled—fifty-seven different ways."

"Get out of here," growled Summerfield, "or you'll miss that train!"

"Well, I'm not missin' any sleep because I can't see straight," scored the driver. And he winked at Ruthven as he went out of the door with an armful of bundles.

"What's the trouble?" Ruthven inquired.

"Funny mix-up in weights," said the agent. "But I guess it's one on me. It only goes to prove that a fellow can't be so wise all the time as he is just some of the time. What are you all dolled up for?" he inquired, taking note of Ruthven's unusual appearance.

Lewis Ruthven was a big fellow, and yet there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on him. His shoulders were broad, his chest was deep, and he measured six feet in height. He had come from the East two months before, and had gone straight into the cattle country to the Barton Ranch south of Burt City.

It was known that Tom Barton was his mother's brother, and that he had come to Montana because he had had a disagreement with his father. How that got out, no one knew. Ruthven himself was not saying a word. He was just cheerfully taking life as he found it, and doing his best to make good on Uncle Tom's lower ranch. Already he had shown such an aptitude for "busting" bronchos and roping steers—and

incidentally cleaning up on the ranch bully—that he had been promoted to be second in command under Hoover over that particular bunch of cattle and cattlemen.

As a general thing when he rode into Burt City, he wore a demoralized broad-brimmed hat, a flannel shirt that showed signs of hard usage, and fringed leather chaps. But now, as he stood in the front of the express office, he wore a sack suit of excellent cut and quality, and a straw hat. His was an appearance to delight the eye, so quiet and masterful and good looking was he.

"I thought the boys would kill me before I got away from the ranch," said Ruthven. "They tried to pull me out of the buckboard and muss me up, and we had a high old time generally; but," he added happily, "I didn't lose so much as a horn button."

"What's the cause of it all?" inquired Summerfield.

"Somebody asked me to do this; somebody whose word is law. Come to supper with me, Joe, and I'll tell you all about it. I want you to help."

"Come in at six, then, and we'll go to 'Ham-And's' for a feed. I've got to work to-night, though."

"Got to? I was hoping——"

"Somebody will be around here to check up the office before very long, and his word comes pretty near being law, too. I've got to be ready for him, Ruthven."

"Oh, well," said the other, "I can talk with you about this business of mine, anyhow. If you've no objections, I'll just sit here and read the paper until you're ready."

Summerfield gave him an easy-chair back of the counter; then he went to take the Barton package back to the storeroom, but changed his mind and decided to leave it out in front for further examination when he could find leisure.

Shortly before six, Reeves got back

from the railroad station with a small truckload of stuff from the west. He would have taken the Barton package to the storeroom for the night, but the agent told him to leave it where it was.

"All right," agreed the driver cheerfully; "but it won't get any heavier there by the counter, Joe."

Hamilton Andrew Leffingwell owned and operated the best restaurant in Burt City. His place was known far and wide as "Ham-And's," which proved how harmony sometimes runs between a man's name and his business. To this place Ruthven and Summerfield repaired for a raid upon the bill of fare, getting a corner table where they could talk for their own benefit and not for that of Ham-And's other patrons.

"It's like this, Summerfield," confided Ruthven, as they ate. "You're pretty well acquainted with Miss Lois McKenzie, and I want an introduction."

Summerfield's heart grew faint. What chance would he have in the race for the hand of the fair Lois with that big, handsome Easterner pitted against him? "What's the idea?" he asked.

"A friend of mine—a very good friend of mine"—and Ruthven's gray eyes glowed brightly as he said it—"has written and asked me to call on Miss McKenzie. I know Miss McKenzie's father, in a way, but I would rather meet the young lady through you."

"Who is the friend that suggested this?" inquired Summerfield.

Ruthven drew a seal leather photograph case from the left inside pocket of his coat, opened it reverently, and held a lovely pictured face before the eyes of his friend. "The sweetest little girl in the world," he declared, with fine feeling, "and whenever she asks a favor of me it is as good as done. That is Miss Gwendolyn Arnold, Summerfield."

As the express agent peered into the beaming, earnest face across the table, all his vague fears took instant flight. Ruthven would not—could not—prove

a rival. There could be no doubt that his affections were already anchored.

"Miss Arnold and Miss McKenzie were friends at Vassar College," explained Ruthven, "and I have been requested, as a friend of Miss Arnold, to make the acquaintance of Miss McKenzie. Miss Arnold seems to have the idea that the rugged life of the ranch will make a barbarian out of me unless I have the refining influences of feminine society."

"Bless her heart, Summerfield," he continued; "so long as I have such beautiful memories of her to cheer my mortal existence, nothing else is necessary to keep me in the straight and narrow way. But she has spoken, and I obey. It—it will give me a chance to write more frequently. I wonder if you get that?"

Impulsively Summerfield reached across the table and caught Ruthven's hand in a firm and understanding grip. "It will give me the greatest pleasure, old man," he answered. "We understand each other, I think."

Glances crossed, and smiles came to each face. "I think so," said Ruthven, with emphasis. "If you can't go with me to McKenzie's to-night, when can you go?"

"As I told you," went on Summerfield, "I am working this evening; but Lois said she would call on me at the office. She does that occasionally, when the grind keeps me rather late; and then I walk home with her. She dropped in to-day to tell me that she would see me at the office this evening."

"Bully!" exclaimed Ruthven. "You can do the formal thing, and then, later on, perhaps I can call with you at the house."

"That's the ticket exactly! By the way, Lois mentioned your name when she saw me. Miss Arnold has written to her about you, so you're expected."

"That couldn't be better. When do you want me to show up at the office?"

"Make it nine o'clock."

"I'll be there."

Supper over, Ruthven went to the hotel to write some letters, and Summerfield returned to his office and got busy with his books and papers. At eight-thirty Lois came, and sat near while he finished his labors. Then, when he had put away his books, he went over to the drug store for two dishes of ice cream. They preferred eating the ice cream comfortably by themselves in the office. Summerfield then told Lois about Ruthven.

"You'll like him," he declared. "Everybody does. He has a way of taking a person by storm, you might say. He is a college man, and his father is rich and contracts for improvements of various kinds all over the world. Nobody seems to know just why the son is putting in his time in this out-of-the-way corner of the country, but he's surprising everybody by the way he does things on Barton's Ranch No. 2."

"He helped out an unfortunate friend in the East," said Lois, "and got dismissed from a School of Mines on account of it. His father sent him to Montana—by way of punishment, I suppose. Also his father cut down his usual allowance, and Mr. Ruthven then refused to take any allowance at all." Her eyes sparkled. "That is the sort of man he is, Joe."

"Paragon, eh?" returned Joe grumpily.

She laughed, and leaned forward to box his ears gently. "I can tell, from the way Gwen writes, just how the land lies," she went on. "Lewis Ruthven is her knight, without fear and without reproach. We must do what we can to make life pleasant for him out here, Joe."

Before Summerfield could answer, Ruthven came in, and the formality of an introduction was gone through. Summerfield left the two chatting in the cage and went out to put away the Bar-

ton package for the night. As he picked it up to take it to the storeroom, he gave an exclamation of astonishment. Turning on an electric light over the scales, he proceeded to weigh the package. Then he yelled, and the other two came hurrying out.

"What's the matter, Joe?" asked Lois, alarmed.

"Look at this, will you?" returned the agent. "Both of you look. Tell me, on your sacred honor, what does that package weigh?"

"Nine pounds," said Ruthven, studying the scales.

"Exactly nine pounds," seconded Lois.

CHAPTER III.

"JEST BOOTS."

SUMMERFIELD drew his hand across his eyes. "I wonder if I'm crazy," he gasped, "or if this is just a plain case of witchcraft? That package weighed six pounds when it was first brought in; then it weighed eight; then six again; and now you tell me it's nine. What's the answer?"

"The answer is," said Ruthven, "that you probably made a mistake in weighing the package when it was first brought in."

"Al took it in and weighed it," returned Summerfield.

"Then it was Al's error, right at the start."

"I weighed it carefully while Al was out, and it weighed eight pounds. When he came back, we both weighed it, and it weighed six pounds. There's no way of getting around that. Al's eyes and mine couldn't be deceived at the same time, any more than three pairs of eyes can be fooled right now."

"H'm!" mused Ruthven thoughtfully. "Maybe there's another package in the office similar to this one and you've been getting them mixed up?"

"No, there is only one package for

Barton, at Dry Wash, and that's it, there on the scales. There'd have to be three packages in order to get three different weights."

Ruthven, his interest suddenly intensified, took the parcel up in his hands. "So this is for Uncle Tom, eh?" he remarked. "What is it?"

"Blamed if I know. Consignors are Long & McKenzie. Barton often sends here for stuff he can't get in Dry Wash."

"Then I'll tell you, Summerfield," asserted Ruthven; "there's something wrong with your scales. Scales go wrong once in a while, you know. Why, I've heard how crooked sports, weighing a pugilist in at a prize fight, would stick a quarter to the under side of a weight with a piece of gum, making a hundred-and-sixty-five-pound man weigh in at one hundred and forty-five though every——"

"There could be no tampering of that sort in this office," interrupted Summerfield. "Al Reeves is as square as a die; and what would be the use of monkeying with the weight of a parcel like that, anyhow? And I'm sure of these scales; but, just to make assurance doubly sure, I'll look them over."

This he did, and he even went so far as to use a feather duster. The Barton package still weighed nine pounds.

"Try it on the Fairbanks, over there," suggested Ruthven, indicating a large platform scales on the other side of the room. The arm of the Fairbanks hung at a nice balance with the weight in the nine-pound notch.

"That's the weight, all right," declared Ruthven, puzzled; "it has always been the weight, too. A fellow has got to use reason, Summerfield, and that's what reason tells us. This six-pound and eight-pound stuff must be all flap-doodle."

Summerfield grinned in his bewilderment. "I'd like to hear you tell Al that

six-pound stuff is flapdoodle," said he. "Fur would begin to fly, right off. I'll lock the package in the storeroom and let him weigh it for himself in the morning."

The storeroom was partitioned off at one corner of the express company's quarters. In the end, it had one window, crossed with longitudinal bars, overlooking the alley. Summerfield deposited the package in a vacant place on the shelf, and carefully locked the door upon it. Then all but one electric bulb was switched off in the big room and the three left the place.

The agent was going to walk home with Lois McKenzie. It was a case, Ruthven thought, where there was a crowd, so he excused himself when near the hotel.

"I'm going to be in town overnight, Summerfield," said he, "in order to transact some business at the bank tomorrow for Jed Hoover, Uncle Tom's foreman at Ranch Two. Maybe I'll drop around and find out if that Barton package continues to grow."

"Come in before ten-thirty, then," said Summerfield. "The package goes west on Seventeen, and that pulls through Burt City at eleven. Al takes outgoing stuff down half an hour before train time."

"Correct!" assented Ruthven.

Miss McKenzie, of course, asked him to call at her home whenever he happened to be in town and could find time to do so. "Gwen has written me a good deal about you, Mr. Ruthven," she observed, "and Joe and I both would like to do all we can to make your stay in Montana pleasant."

"That's very kind of you," said Ruthven gratefully. "I shall probably bother you and Joe a good deal." He bade both of them good night, and made his way across the street to the hotel.

Next morning Summerfield heard that Harrington, the traveling agent, was in town. That meant a checking

up of the office, and the agent congratulated himself on having everything shipshape and ready for inspection. Summerfield's mind was upon Harrington, and the mystery surrounding the Barton package was temporarily dismissed from his thoughts. At half past nine, however, Lewis Ruthven wandered in, and the agent's mind was suddenly prodded.

"How much does it weigh now?" inquired Ruthven quizzically.

"We'll see," the agent answered. He turned to the driver, who was busy in the back part of the room. "Al," he called, "how much did you say that Barton package weighed?"

"Six pounds—s-i-x," was the prompt response. "Half a dozen; three times two; one, two, three, four, five, six!"

Summerfield turned blandly to Ruthven. "You see how positive that little runt is?" he remarked. "He's Mr. Know-It-All in this shebang."

"He's got a surprise coming," chuckled Ruthven. "Haven't you weighed the parcel this morning?"

"Hadn't thought about it until now. You see, Harrington, the traveling agent, is in town to check up the office. My mind has been on him."

"Right where it ought to be, by jing!" called Reeves. "When Harrington finds out the boss of this office is off his trolley, the kibosh is liable to drop. Maybe I'll be agent, you can't tell."

"Come out of that delirium, Al!" suggested the agent. "And get the Barton package and put it on the scales. It weighs nine pounds."

"You're spoofing me, old chap," returned Reeves. "You've had another bad turn, and I hate to think of what's going to happen to you. Bughouse, bughouse!"

"Nine pounds, Al!" declared Ruthven. "I was here last night when Summerfield weighed the package."

"Now there's two of you!" moaned

Reeves. "Wonder where this thing's goin' to stop?"

When he had vanished into the storeroom, Ruthven and Summerfield winked at each other and slyly smiled. "Here's where we land on that little upstart," said the agent. "He's got a surprise coming."

"Surest thing you know," the other agreed.

They watched from the front of the office while Reeves emerged from the storeroom and placed the package on the scales. He looked once at the tilted beam, then turned away to his work with a grunt of disgust.

"Ah, ha!" jeered Summerfield. "Now what do you think, you loquacious false alarm? Struck you dumb, didn't it?"

"Oh, look; go look!" snorted the driver.

Summerfield and Ruthven walked to the packing scales. Both bent down, smiling, then started erect with astounded eyes on each other. The package weighed six pounds!

The agent staggered to the water cooler and took a drink. Then he unbuttoned his collar. "I've got to have air," he gasped.

"I don't see why," said Al. "You're fuller of hot air than a balloon. Say, you make me tired. Is this all for Seventeen? Gi'me that!" he added, holding out his hand for the Barton package. "It's goin' west, and I want to tote it away from this hang-out before Joe gets any worse'n he is."

Ruthven was examining the package, his eyes wide with amazement. "Look here, Summerfield!" he called. The agent walked over to him. "See that?" And Ruthven indicated a penciled cross at one end of the package under the cord.

"What of it?" asked Summerfield.

"Last evening, while you weren't looking, Miss McKenzie and I put that private mark on the package, so we could identify it later, if we wanted to.

There it is. That makes this mystery brain-staggering. My wits are all scrambled. Hanged if I can make head or tail of it."

"Same here. But what's the use of bothering? The package leaves this office as per waybill. Load it up, Al," he added.

"Wait a minute!" interposed Ruthven. "Phone The Emporium and ask Long or McKenzie to come down here. We'll have one of the shippers open the package and show us what it is that shifts its weight from six to eight and nine pounds and then back to six again. Hanged if I can rest till we know more."

"I can tell you what it is," said the driver; "imagination, that's what. You'll have to hurry—I don't want to miss Seventeen."

"You've got a whole hour, even if Seventeen is on time," returned Summersfield, and went to the phone. After a few minutes he hung up and turned away. "Long and McKenzie are both coming," he announced. "Maybe they can shed a little light on this business. Good idea, Ruthven, and I'm glad you suggested it."

In five minutes the two partners came into the express office. "What's to pay, Joe?" wheezed Long, wiping the perspiration from his fat face as he leaned over the counter. "Think we're shippin' clockwork bombs by express, same as that holdup man done a spell ago and blowed up a car and wrecked a train? What ails that Barton package, anyhow?"

"It has a way of getting heavy and then light," explained the agent, a little sheepishly, for the matter seemed too absurd for serious consideration. "Mind telling us what's in it, Mr. Long?"

"What do you mean, gets heavy and then light?" queried the senior partner.

The agent explained, and Long laughed till he almost choked. "You're

batty, jest batty!" he said. "Here, I'll show you what's in it."

He reached for the package, carefully untied and removed the string, and took out a heavy pasteboard box. Removing the cover of the box, he held up the tan bluchers with the eighteen-inch tops. "Jest boots," he chuckled.

"For your uncle, Thomas Barton, Mr. Ruthven," put in McKenzie. "He always sends to our store for that sort of footgear."

"Orders a pair every summer," added Long.

"Anything inside those boots?" inquired Ruthven.

"See for yourself."

Ruthven turned both boots upside down and shook them. In order to further convince himself, he ran a hand into each of them. "Nothing inside," he announced. Then he examined the box. It was perfectly empty and had contained only the boots.

McKenzie wrapped up the package again, carefully adjusting wrapper and string in the old creases so as not to disturb the express company's marks. Thereupon the partners went away again, Long fairly strangling with mirth.

"Jest boots," whispered Summerfield to Ruthven. "Load 'em up, Al!" he added vigorously to the driver. "See how quick you can get 'em away from here."

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER JOLT.

MAYBE them boots gather moisture from the air," suggested the driver, with mock gravity, "and then maybe they dry out again. That's the how of it, Joe. They took on three pounds o' dampness last night, and then shed it this morning."

"If you'd dry up a little yourself, I'd like it mighty well!" growled Summerfield.

"Maybe they're seven-league boots, and full of hocus-pocus," went on Reeves, moving toward the front door with the package.

"There'll be a massacre around here if you don't quit!" yelled the agent darkly.

"There was somethin' I wanted to tell you," went on the driver from the door, "and I plumb forgot it till now. Lois McKenzie went east on Six, at eight-thirty. I saw her gettin' on the train."

"What!" exclaimed Summerfield.

Reeves repeated his statement. "Didn't you know?" he added. "She wasn't totin' any luggage, and like as not she has skipped town to get rid of the express agent." With which unfeeling comment the freckle-faced driver took himself off, climbed into his wagon, and drove away.

"I can't understand this," muttered Summerfield. "Lois never said a word last night about leaving town. There's something in the wind that I can't understand. Lois hasn't seemed at all like herself for a week or more."

"Bosh!" exclaimed Ruthven. "That's only your imagination, Summerfield!"

"Everything seems to be getting my goat the last few days," remarked the agent. "Even a pesky trifle like that Barton package gets me all up in the air. Well, I'm going to find out about Lois, right now."

He turned to the telephone and called for Long & McKenzie. Long answered, and Summerfield asked for McKenzie. Ruthven, leaning on the counter, was so close to the telephone that he could hear what came over the wire.

"Mac ain't here," said Long.

"This is Summerfield, at the express office. Can you tell me where I can find Mr. McKenzie?"

"He went down to the train to meet his daughter. She's comin' in on Seventeen."

"I didn't know till just a moment ago that Lois was out of town."

"She went over to Williamsburg, Mac told me, on No. 6, this morning. Don't worry, Joe," said Long jestingly; "I'm purty sure there ain't anybody else. Them boots got any bigger since I left? I jest had time to walk to the store from your place when the phone jingled, and I allowed it might be you, reportin' more heft to them boots o' Barton's. When they weigh a hundred pounds, you let me know. Price o' leather is goin' up, and—"

The receiver went up, right on the hook, and with a bang. "Everybody seems to think they got a right to josh me," growled Summerfield. "Williamsburg is only fifteen miles east, and Lois went over there on an errand. She'll be back at eleven. I guess she thought it wasn't necessary to mention such a short trip. Do you think your uncle could tell us anything about what's the matter with those boots, Ruthven?"

"I don't see how he could. You're rid of the boots now, Summerfield, and you shouldn't let them worry you any longer."

"Plague take it all!" said the agent. "I'm nervous. I've got a feeling that something is about to happen. You see, I——"

He broke off abruptly. A little man in a derby hat and wearing side whiskers came briskly in at the door.

"Why, hello, Mr. Harrington!" called Summerfield.

"Hello!" was the reply, with a short nod. "How's everything, Summerfield?"

"About as usual."

Harrington made himself perfectly at home. Walking around behind the counter, he removed his derby hat and hung it on a nail; then he drew from his pocket a black silk skullcap and pulled it carefully down over a head prematurely bald. Next, he got out of his coat, hung it under his derby, and, taking out his cuff buttons, turned up his shirt sleeves. All the while he was

taking stock of Ruthven, for the company did not like to have outsiders hanging around its offices.

Summerfield noted the glances. "Mr. Harrington," said he, "my friend Mr. Lewis Ruthven."

"No relation of Emmet K. Ruthven, I suppose?" queried Harrington.

"Emmet K. happens to be his father," said the agent.

At once the traveling agent thawed. Emmet K. Ruthven was a name to conjure with.

"The dickens!" gasped Harrington, holding out his hand. "This is a pleasure, believe me. Your father, sir, has built more railroads in the West than any other contractor in the country."

Ruthven shook the offered hand. He was not the one, however, to sound his father's praises. Not that he did not admire Emmet K.'s achievements, for he did tremendously; but he preferred to let others blow the trumpet.

Harrington, greatly mellowed by meeting this son of a great man, went into the cage. Summerfield was about to follow him and get the books and documents out of the safe when the telephone bell rang. He halted to answer the call. As before, Ruthven was able to hear what came over the wire.

"Who's this?" queried the agent crisply.

"Al," was the response. "I'm at the depot. Say, Joe, what d'you think?"

The driver had received a jolt of some sort, that was evident. His voice was jerky and hoarse with excitement.

"What do you want?" demanded Summerfield sharply. That was no time for persiflage. Harrington was there, and he had eyes and ears for all that was going on.

"It's about that Barton package. When I picked it up to put it on the truck, it seemed heavier than it ought to, so I jest toted it into the baggage room and weighed it."

"How much did it weigh?"

"Ten pounds!"

"Whose imagination is working now?" jeered Summerfield. He could not help that comment, Harrington or no Harrington.

"That's all right, old man, but what shall I do?

"Let it go with the rest of the stuff, of course," was the answer. "What're you bothering me for?" He banged the receiver on the hook.

"That Barton shipment gained four pounds between here and the depot, Ruthven," said Summerfield. "Al has pulled in his horns. I guess, by golly, it's getting *him*."

"What's that, what's that?" inquired Harrington. "A package gaining four pounds in weight between this office and the depot? Unheard of! Preposterous! What do you mean?"

"Rather mysterious thing, Mr. Harrington," returned Summerfield, as the distant whistle of Seventeen was heard, blowing for Burt City. "You know Thomas Barton, up at Dry Wash?"

"Of course! Everybody knows Tom Barton. He is Emmet K. Ruthven's brother-in-law," and the traveling agent shot a friendly glance at Lewis. "What's Barton got to do with it?"

"He ordered a pair of boots from Long & McKenzie, here in Burt City; a certain kind of laced knee boots—gets a pair every summer, Mr. Long says. Reeves, the driver, took them in yesterday, too late for Seventeen, which carries the local stuff. The boots weighed six pounds."

"Pretty good weight, that, for a pair of boots. But go on!"

"I weighed 'em later, and they weighed eight pounds; then Reeves and I weighed them together, still later, and they were back to six pounds. Last evening they went up to nine pounds. Ruthven happened to be here at the time, and he'll bear me out. They weighed nine pounds last evening, didn't they, Ruthven?" he appealed.

"Certainly they did!" was the emphatic reply.

"This morning, Mr. Harrington, they were down to the original six pounds again."

The effect of all this upon Harrington was peculiar to say the least. He had started up from his chair with horror growing in his eyes. His lips were dry, and he moistened them with his tongue. Twice he tried to talk, but the words stuck in his throat. In the dead, dramatic silence, No. 17 was again heard in the distance, rolling westward.

Finally the traveling agent found his voice. "For Heaven's sake!" he gulped. "What else, Summerfield, what else? Speak quick, man!"

Both the agent and Ruthven were surprised at the traveling agent's show of consternation. "Why," faltered Summerfield, "what is there about——"

"Tell me the rest of it!" shouted Harrington, bounding clear of the cage. "Go on!"

"There's not much else, sir," said Summerfield, pulling his wits together. "The package weighed six pounds when it left here, and Reeves, the driver, just phoned that the package seemed badly overweight when he started to put it on the truck, so he carried it in to the baggage room and put it on the scales. He said it weighed ten pounds, but I told him to let it go forward according to waybill."

"The devil!" cried Harrington despairingly, hopping around like a Comanche Indian doing a war dance. "Phone the station for Reeves to hold out that Barton package!"

"It's already loaded and——"

"Then phone for the agent to stop the train!"

"Train's gone!"

Harrington hurdled the counter like an accomplished athlete, tore through the door, and was off through Burt City like a streak. He was in such a hurry that he never stopped to put on his

coat. He had rushed away just as he was, in skullcap and shirt sleeves.

Ruthven stepped to the door to watch him. Without let or stay, the traveling agent was galloping for the railroad station. People in the street stopped to watch him with wonder. Presently Harrington whisked around a corner and was lost to sight.

Ruthven came back into the office. "What do you know about that!" he cried.

Summerfield was lying limply across the counter, his face white and his eyes filled with foreboding. He roused up a little as he met Ruthven's bewildered gaze.

"What have I done?" he inquired wildly. "Anything that I shouldn't? What was it hit Harrington so hard? Boots for Barton! Hanged if I can see how—"

Just at that moment Reeves drove up to the walk in front, tumbled out of his wagon, and rushed in. "Ten pounds!" he cried. "By thunder, that's what it weighed! Ask the baggage agent! I made him look at the scales to make sure. Wouldn't it rattle your spurs, Joe? What's Harrington tearing down the street for? He passed me, goin' like a comet. Is it anythin' about that Barton package?"

"I should imagine so," returned Summerfield wearily.

"What about it? Don't be so blamed close-mouthed."

"You'll have to ask Harrington, Al," was the reply. "He's the only one who knows what's in the wind."

CHAPTER V.

OVERHAULING SEVENTEEN.

THE baffling nature of the mystery caused a sudden silence to fall over the three in the express office. The moment was a breathless one for Al Reeves, and seemingly painful as well.

He pulled off his cap and ran his fingers through his mop of fiery hair.

"Somebody wake me up," he murmured, "or I'm goin' to scream. Joe smoked a double-X brand of dope in this bloomin' roost, and I been ketchin' the fumes. Johnnie Hocus-pocus is givin' us a run for our auburn chip, and that's what. When I weighed that bunch o' trouble at the baggage room and found it had put on four pounds between here and the depot, everythin' got black. I felt like I wanted to run around in circles and gibber. Then—then—" He broke off abruptly.

"Say," he went on, veering to another tack, "Lois McKenzie got in on Seventeen. Her father was at the station to meet her, and he gave a grip to somebody on the train. You'd have thought the girl had been gone a year from the fuss McKenzie made over her. She—"

Tingle-ingle-ingle! The telephone bell rattled. Summerfield's hand, on the way to the receiver, poised uncertainly in the air.

"I'm getting so I hate to answer the phone," said he. "Never know whether I'm due for a josh or a jolt. What do you think it is this time?" The bell snapped another warning, wild and impatient. "Here goes!" muttered Summerfield, and took down the receiver. "Hello!"

A rush of words came along the wire. "On the jump, sir!" said the agent, and hung up.

"It's Harrington," he announced, hustling into his cage and throwing books and papers into the safe. "He's at the division superintendent's office." The agent talked as he worked. "Wants me to come down to the station and wait on the platform. Says if Ruthven's here he's to come, too, if he will. There's a ruction of some kind afoot. Al, you're to take charge of the office till I get back."

Slam went the safe door, and the

knob of the combination rattled as it whirled. Then bang went the door of the cage. "Come on, Ruthven!" By then Summerfield was out from behind the counter and on his way to the sidewalk.

"How long will you be gone, Joe?" inquired Reeves.

"Don't know—don't know anything! You just sit on the lid." The agent ran into the street with Ruthven close behind him.

The two laid a bee line for the railroad station. "Haven't you any idea what we're wanted for, Summerfield?" queried Ruthven.

"What is an idea?" returned the other, as he hurried along. "I couldn't apprehend one with a search warrant. My mind is a blank. Harrington has cracked the whip, and that's my signal to jump. I suppose we'll know something about this some time, but just now we've got to surge ahead in the dark. Harrington, I take it, went straight to the division superintendent of the railroad. Between them they've cooked up some scheme or other in mighty short order. What it is is a conundrum, and we haven't any time for a guessing contest."

Burt City was the headquarters of the railroad division. The station was a big building, with ticket office and waiting rooms below, and all upstairs given over to Durfee, the division boss, dispatchers, and rooms for other officials on Durfee's staff. When Ruthven and Summerfield reached the station platform, they encountered a headquarters "slave" coming from the direction of the roundhouse. The man's name was Perkins. He was in his shirt sleeves and wore an eye shade.

"Hello, Summerfield!" said Perkins. "You're in on this hurry-up business, too, eh? I heard Harrington telephoning you as I left the office."

"What's up, Perk?" queried the agent.

"A small-sized tornado just blew out of the old man's private sanctum. The dispatcher was ordered to hold Seventeen at Bluffton, first station west. I was told to go over to the yards and pick up the first engine I could find. Near as I can make out, the super, Harrington, and the rest of you are going after Seventeen. The regular west-bound has been laid out, and particular Cain raised with the dispatcher's train sheet. The light engine is to have the right of way, and— Ah, here's Long! Guess he must be in the party, too."

The senior member of the firm of Long & McKenzie came puffing down the platform at that moment. He was red and perspiring and tremendously excited. "Where's Durfee?" he asked. "What am I here for? Mac hadn't got back to the store, so I couldn't bring him along. What in thunder has the division superintendent been stirring up?"

"We're in the dark, Long, same as you," returned Summerfield.

"Was you told to come here?"

"Yes."

"Ruthven the same?"

"Yes. From what I can learn, we're all to ride with Durfee and Harrington on a light engine to Bluffton. Seventeen is to be held there until we can overhaul her."

Long mopped his dripping, astounded face with a red bandanna handkerchief. "Well, I'll be ding-busted!" he exclaimed. "This comes mighty near bein' the limit. Huh!" he added, "here's a locomotive backin' up with a caboose. Wonder if that's our special?"

"Must be," said Perkins. "It's the old switch bumper, Sixty-seven. The way car will help to balance her, and keep her from running her nose into the roadbed."

Perkins said no more, but plowed along dutifully toward the stairs that led to the second-story offices. Durfee and Harrington had just appeared, red-

faced and excited, and were running toward the way car. Harrington had found a linen duster somewhere, and a hat. The linen duster was too big for him, and he had rolled back the sleeves. The hat was a soft felt, and he had pulled it down over his skullcap.

"Get on, you fellows!" Harrington yelled, looking toward Ruthven, Long, and Summerfield. "We can't let any grass grow under us—we've got to hustle."

Durfee had run forward for a word with the engineer. Instructions took no more than a minute, and the extra west got under way, the superintendent swinging nimbly up on the steps as the way car came along. The others were all inside the car, and three of them were palpitating with excitement and curiosity. Ruthven had never met Durfee, and in that crisis no one thought of giving him an introduction. In the circumstances it was hardly necessary.

"What's the row, Durfee?" demanded Long. "I ought to know why you're taking me away from the store like this."

"We'll not keep you from your business very long," answered the superintendent. "Ten minutes at Bluffton will be enough, and then we'll all come back. Maybe we'll be gone an hour, all told."

"Providing," qualified Harrington wildly, "nothing happens!"

Durfee nodded grimly. "That's right, Harrington," he agreed; "and we'll hope for the best."

"What the devil *can* happen?" inquired Long, in a puzzled voice, as he peered through a window. "About the only thing I'm afeared of is that this bobtailed train will turn a somersault into the right of way. What's the use of goin' so fast?"

The engineer was certainly "hitting it up." The landscape was reeling past the windows, and the way car lurched and jumped like an untamed broncho.

"We're not telling you fellows every-

thing," said the superintendent, "because Harrington and I do not think it wise; but we need you with us, and the business is important. If it wasn't, do you think I'd lay out the schedule of Seventeen like I'm doing? By thunder, I've never had anything throw such a scare into me!"

Durfee had his sea legs on, and could walk up and down the car with remarkable stability. This he proceeded to do, from time to time consulting his watch. The wheel flanges screeched on the curves, the way car shivered and rattled and seemed every moment on the point of going to pieces, while black soft-coal smoke floated back from the switch bumper and buried the car at intervals.

Long left the bench at the side of the caboose and made his way to a chair that was riveted to the floor. There he sat, in front of a small desk, hanging onto the chair arms for dear life and watching pictures of prize fighters and actresses dance around the little bulkhead to which the desk was secured. He was consumed with curiosity regarding the object of that wild ride, and yet he was so afraid the caboose would leave the rails that he had no heart for asking questions.

And, anyhow, Durfee and Harrington were saying nothing about their reasons for overhauling Seventeen. As the superintendent had said, they were keeping that to themselves. There was a tenseness in the air, however, that hinted of great and awful possibilities. Durfee continued to walk back and forth, and Harrington evinced his disordered state of mind by pulling at his side whiskers.

Ruthven and Summerfield braced themselves side by side on a bench. The former reflected, in a milder degree, the vague fears of trouble playing in the express agent's face.

"The super and the traveling agent have got us all guessing," Ruthven said

into Summerfield's ear. "But why the deuce they want me along is the hardest thing to understand."

"We'll see later on," the other returned. "We're close to Bluffton now, and when we're there the secret will come out."

A half dozen houses, a station about the size of a bandbox, and a water tank comprised the settlement of Bluffton. Ruthven, peering from the car as they slowed to a halt, could also see a number of stock pens. The place was a cattle-shipping point, it seemed. Barely had the extra stopped when Durfee made for the door. "All out!" he called.

The five in the way car tumbled from the forward platform. Seventeen was waiting just ahead. Some of the passengers were stretching their legs in the vicinity of the station and good-naturedly putting up with the delay. Others, who had close connections to make at a point farther on, were not so good-natured. The fireman of Seventeen's engine was on the ground and calmly using an oil can. The engineer leaned against one of the big drivers and watched curiously while the conductor hurried to meet the division superintendent.

"What's all the trouble, Mr. Durfee?" asked the conductor.

"Nothing that concerns you, Leason," Durfee answered, making his way toward the express car. The side door of this car was open, and the messenger stood within it. "Our business is here," added Durfee, and climbed up with a helping hand from the messenger.

Harrington followed, and he turned to beckon imperatively to Long, Ruthven, and Summerfield.

"You've got a prepaid parcel for Thomas Barton, consignees Long & McKenzie, Burt City," said the traveling agent. "Let's see it, Billings. Careful with it!" he cautioned.

Billings was careful with the package

and careful to conceal his surprise. "Here it is," said he, and offered the Barton shipment.

With evident apprehension, Harrington took the package in his hands. Almost instantly his face cleared of worry. "I guess this is a case of all cry and no wool, Durfee," said he, in evident relief. "We're hornswoggled. If this weighs more than six pounds, I'll eat it."

"Pshaw!" grunted Durfee, as he took the package. "No ten pounds there." He drew a hand across his forehead. "I reckon we're safe," he added.

A howl of wrath came from Long. "Is this what you snatched me away from The Emporium for? That gol-binged package again! Say, this joke has gone far enough."

CHAPTER VI. CHANGING HIS PLANS.

LONG'S angry remarks passed unheeded. Harrington turned to Summerfield. "Is that the package that passed through your office?" he asked.

"Yes," the agent answered.

"You are absolutely positive, are you?"

"Yes."

"How about you, Mr. Ruthven? Tell me: Would you declare, under oath, that that package is the one which you and Summerfield found to weigh nine pounds, and then six?"

Ruthven took the package in his own hands, and found the penciled mark he had placed on it for identification.

"I'm positive it is the same package," he declared.

"Mr. Long, what have you to say?"

"This thing makes me mighty tired," was the disgusted response. "That's all I've got to say. Nobody seems to have any horse sense. It was bad enough to have Summerfield go off the jump, but to have the foolishness spread the way it has is enough to make a man ashamed of the human race. That's

the package we sent. Say, look here once."

He grabbed the parcel, untied it, unwrapped it, removed the cover of the heavy pasteboard box, and held up the tan bluchers with the eighteen-inch tops. "Jest boots!" he shouted, waving the footgear. "Boots for Tom Barton, at Dry Wash! Hang it, they'll be worn out afore they ever git to Barton, at this rate."

Harrington took the boots, replaced them in the box, carefully rewrapped and retied the package, and handed it back to Billings.

"That's enough," grunted Durfee. "I guess we've assassinated the time-table sufficiently with this wild-goose chase. All out, you men for the extra, and we'll let Seventeen proceed."

Harrington followed Durfee out of the express car, and Ruthven and Long and Summerfield followed Harrington. "Let her go!" said the superintendent to the conductor, and the latter yelled "All ab-o-o-ard," got the passengers back in the coaches, and gave the signal to the engineer.

Durfee went into the little station to send a message to the dispatcher, and Harrington trailed along. Ruthven, Summerfield, and Long remained on the platform and watched Seventeen pull out. Just then a face at one of the car windows caught Ruthven's attention. He gave an exclamation, stood irresolute for a moment, and then ran to board the rear platform of the last car.

"Summerfield," he called, "telephone Hoover that I'll be back to the ranch to-morrow!" That was all he had time to say.

His companions on the platform were surprised at this unexpected move. "What's the matter with him?" asked Long.

"Give it up," answered Summerfield. "Guess he saw somebody he knew on Seventeen, and went along to have a visit."

"Must have wanted a visit pretty tarnation bad," grunted the other.

In truth, Ruthven had seen a man whom he knew, but he had not boarded Seventeen in order to visit him. The last time Ruthven had seen that particular person had been in the Catskill Mountains, near the town of Cairo, and a little nearer to the village of Purling, in New York. The fellow was a crook, and had stolen ten thousand dollars from the country home of a broker where Ruthven had been staying for a few days. His name was Morrison, and he had been nicknamed the "Weasel." He was a most accomplished cracksman, and was even then being searched for by the New York authorities.

Ruthven was stunned with surprise at the fleeting glimpse he obtained of Weasel Morrison's face. Morrison was far from his thoughts, and the very last man in the world he would have dreamed of seeing. Destiny plays some queer pranks, however, and perhaps it was not so odd that Morrison should be in the West, since the East had become too hot to hold him. The strange part of it was that Morrison should have been on Seventeen, that Ruthven should have happened to be with the party that had overhauled the train, and that at the last moment he should have seen Morrison's face at the window of the moving coach.

Ruthven was impulsive, and he had acted solely upon impulse at Bluffton. As he walked into the coach and seated himself, his mind had already begun to debate the advisability of the sudden move he had made.

In the first place, the man might not be Weasel Morrison at all. Ruthven had a keen eye and a good memory for faces, but he had had only a quick look at one face in a car whose windows furnished a broadside of faces. It might easily prove that he was mistaken. Besides, what was he to do even

if the man really turned out to be Weasel Morrison?

On at least one account, Ruthven would much have preferred that Morrison should keep his liberty. His capture meant an airing in court of the lawless work in the Catskills, and a dragging in the mire of dishonor of the name of a classmate. That classmate was now recovering the ground his false step had lost for him, and it might cost him dear to have his error published by Morrison. But, nevertheless, Ruthven felt that the law required a duty of him.

"I hope the fellow isn't Morrison," he said to himself as he got up to go into the coach ahead to carry his investigations further.

Before he could reach the front platform, the conductor entered the car. "Jupiter!" exclaimed the trainman. "I thought you were with the superintendent's party?"

"I was," answered Ruthven, "but I thought I saw somebody I knew on the train as it pulled by, and I jumped on the last car."

"Make a mistake?"

"I don't know yet. Just come this way with me for a minute."

He stepped out on the swaying platforms between the cars, and peered through the glass top of the door of the second coach. The conductor followed him obligingly.

"See that man in the gray cap, sitting on the left side, about the middle of the car?" Ruthven asked.

"Oh, that fellow! Yes, I see him. He got aboard in Dakota somewhere, and is traveling to Dry Wash."

"You don't happen to know his name, I suppose?"

"Hardly; but—" The conductor paused, evidently turning some matter over in his mind. "Come back into the rear car a moment," he added presently.

Ruthven went with him, and they sat down together in a forward seat.

"Are you acquainted in Burt City?" the trainman went on.

"A little."

"Do you know Miss Lois McKenzie, of that place?"

Ruthven was startled somewhat by this question. Why had the conductor dragged Miss McKenzie into the discussion?

"Yes," he answered, "I am acquainted with Miss McKenzie."

"Then perhaps I can give you a line on who that man in the gray cap is. Miss McKenzie boarded this train at Williamsburg and rode to Burt City. She sat with that man part of the way and seemed to know him. Maybe, if he's a mutual friend, you can now guess who he is?"

"If he's a friend of Miss McKenzie's," said Ruthven, "then he isn't the one I know at all. I'll pay my fare to the next station and get off there, taking the first train back to Burt City. I made a fool move when I boarded Seventeen."

"Well, we all make fool moves occasionally," said the conductor in an attempt to be soothing. "Okaday is your stop, but you won't be able to get a train back until late this afternoon." He took the bill Ruthven handed him and returned some change. "Any idea what Durfee had up his sleeve, back at Bluffton?" he queried.

"Not the least."

The conductor moved on, looking somewhat incredulous. Ruthven did not notice the look, for he was thinking of his folly in losing a whole day when he should have been attending to the foreman's business at the bank in Burt City.

When the train halted at Okaday, which appeared to be a town of considerable size, a man with a truckload of express matter was pounding on the closed door of the express car. "What's the matter in there?" the man with the truck was asking of a brakeman.

Something unusual seemed to have happened, and Ruthven strolled forward alongside of the train. At the window through which he had seen the man in the gray hat he paused for a closer scrutiny. No passenger showed through the glass; the sinister face under the gray hat had disappeared.

"Moved to some other seat, I suppose," reflected Ruthven. "Well, it doesn't make much difference anyway —now." He proceeded on to the express car.

Here there was a good deal of excitement. A brakeman had entered the car by an end door, finding it unlocked. He pushed open the side door and thrust out his head excitedly. "Something wrong in here," he announced to the conductor and another brakeman who stood beside the man with the truck. "Billings, the messenger, is all doubled up in a heap. Guess he's sick or something."

The conductor climbed to the truck, and then into the car. He was followed by the other two men. Ruthven, curious, and impelled by a feeling that he might somehow have a personal interest in developments, got upon the truck and peered into the coach.

A brakeman had Billings' head on his knee, and the conductor was bringing a cup of water from the tank. The messenger was reviving, even before the cold water was flung in his face.

"What is the matter?" inquired Ruthven, stepping off the truck and through the wide doorway.

"Maybe Billings hurt himself," said the conductor, "or maybe some one else hurt him. We'll know in a minute. I don't like the look of things. The brakeman says he found the end door unlocked. Billings isn't usually careless."

The messenger, at that moment, lifted his head from the brakeman's knee and sat up. One hand went to the back of his head. "Some—somebody hit

me," he remarked, looking around dazedly.

"When, Billings?" asked the conductor. "Who was it?"

"Not more than two or three miles out of Bluffton," said the messenger, gathering his wits to deal with the puzzling question. "Who it was is more than I know. I was sitting in that chair"—he pointed to an armchair near the middle of the car—"and my back was to the rear door. The fellow, whoever he was, crept in on me and gave me a crack from behind. That's all I remember till just now." Color flushed his pallid face as he struggled to his feet. "Is anything gone?" he asked wildly.

"The scoundrel didn't have time to steal anything, Billings," said the conductor, "if you were only two miles out of Okaday when he bowled you over."

"He must have been a robber!" insisted Billings.

"Then he miscalculated the distance to Okaday and didn't have time to get hold of anything valuable. Can you take on the stuff here? Edson will help you," and he nodded to one of the brakemen.

Ruthven started to leave the car, when his eye lighted upon the Barton package, and he picked it up. A sharp breath fluttered through his lips. The package weighed more than six pounds—he knew it! Turning the package end-up, he looked for the pencil mark. It was there! So Durfee and Harrington had made a mistake, after all. The Barton parcel was overweight, just as when it had left Burt City!

CHAPTER VII.

A FLASH IN THE PAN.

AFTER Seventeen had left Okaday, Leason, the conductor, made his tour of the coaches, collecting tickets and cash fares. He was so startled

he almost dropped his nickel-plated punch when his eyes fell on Ruthven.

"Seems like you just can't tear yourself away from this train," said he.

"Changed my mind again," remarked Ruthven. "How is the express messenger?"

"He's got a sore head, but that's all. Billings was mighty lucky, the way that matter turned out. Not a thing gone; he's checked over his stuff. That robber made a slick move, but it was only a flash in the pan. Where have you made up your mind to go?"

"Dry Wash."

Leason collected the amount due the railroad company, and then passed on to the end of the train.

Presently he came back and dropped into a vacant seat beside Ruthven. "You've got the straight of that express-car business, haven't you?" he queried. "One of the passengers was the holdup man. Between Bluffton and Okaday he sneaked to the express car, and either he found the door open or he picked the lock. He worked quietly and Billings didn't hear him. When he got into the car he hit the messenger over the head, and that gave him a chance to do as he pleased. But he didn't have time to monkey with the safe, where all the stuff worth while was locked up. You see, we were almost within sight of Okaday, and the robber had made a bad mistake in judging distances. All he could do was to drop off the car when we began to slow up for the town. And that's what he did. I told you that your friend had bought a ticket to Dry Wash?"

Ruthven nodded. "Don't call the fellow my friend, though," said he. "If he had been the man I thought he was he wouldn't have been that."

"Well, that chap is missing from among the passengers. I've gone through the train and he isn't aboard."

Ruthven started with surprise. "That means, then," he returned, "that

he was the one who made the attempt on the express car!"

"I don't see how else you can figure it. His ticket read to Dry Wash, and he disappeared between Bluffton and Okaday. Why did he get off? Take it from me, he boarded Seventeen with the idea of rifling the messenger's safe. Billings had more than twenty thousand dollars in cash in his iron box. That is why I declare that Billings was mighty lucky."

"By George!" exclaimed Ruthven. "All this tallies with the character of Weasel Morrison. That is who the fellow was, and I was not mistaken, after all."

"You know him, eh?"

"I know of him. He pulled off a robbery in the Catskill Mountains some time ago, and that also turned out to be a flash in the pan. I was staying at the country home of a broker named Noyes, and Morrison made off with ten thousand dollars from a safe in Noyes' study. I had a little to do with getting the money back, and while that was going on I had an experience with the Weasel that fixed his face in my mind. At Bluffton, as Seventeen was pulling out, I thought I saw Morrison at a coach window. I was so sure it was Morrison that I boarded the train. Then, later, when you told me——"

He paused, greatly disturbed in mind. He was coming to the point where Lois McKenzie figured prominently in the affair, and he was sorry he had pursued the question so far.

"I believe I get you," said Leason. "I told you that Miss McKenzie rode on Seventeen from Williamsburg to Burt City, and that she sat with this —er—Morrison and talked with him. Miss McKenzie is a fine girl, and her father is a member of the legislature, and it isn't possible she would be on speaking terms with a crook. That is the way you reasoned when you finally

decided that you didn't know the man. Is that right?"

"Yes," answered Ruthven slowly and a bit reluctantly. "Of course there is some mistake somewhere. Miss McKenzie has no crooks on her list of acquaintances. She took the only unoccupied seat and just happened to pick out the one with Morrison. They merely talked a little, as chance acquaintances sometimes will. Naturally she had no idea what sort of a man Morrison was."

"I guess that's the size of it," Leason agreed. "That side of the question," and he shot a covert glance at the other man, "had nothing to do with your changing your mind and going on to Dry Wash, had it?"

This manifestly was none of the conductor's business. Still, in the circumstances, he might be excused for putting the question.

"Certainly not," Ruthven answered shortly.

The mysterious Barton package was what had caused Ruthven to change his mind and continue the unexpected journey to Dry Wash. His curiosity had been so profoundly stirred by that last increase in the parcel's weight that he had suddenly decided to follow it through to the other ranch. He knew that his absence would not inconvenience Hoover particularly, and his fears had been somewhat aroused by the strange actions of Durfee and Harrington. He did not take the trouble to explain all this to Leason.

"Are you acquainted in Dry Wash?" pursued the conductor.

"Never have been there. Thomas Barton, who has a ranch near the town, is my uncle. My name is Ruthven."

Barton was well and favorably known all over Montana. Most of the people, too, were aware that his brother-in-law was the great Emmet K. Ruthven.

"Thunder!" mused Leason. "Then

you must be the Lewis Ruthven I've been hearing about—the chap who had a flare-up with Emmet K. and was sent to Montana as a—" The conductor paused. His excitement was betraying him too far, and he realized it suddenly.

Ruthven stiffened. "I don't know what you heard, nor whom you heard it from," said he, "but there was no 'flare-up,' as you call it, between my father and me. Emmet K. is one of the finest fellows that ever lived. There may have been a slight misunderstanding between us, but when he gets back to the home office from San Francisco he will know just where I stand."

"Beg your pardon, Mr. Ruthven," mumbled Leason. "I didn't mean to blab out the rumors that are going around. Emmet K. is famous throughout the West, and whatever concerns him is considered public property."

"I'm standing on my own feet," said Ruthven, with a considerable show of feeling. "I don't care to be famous, or infamous, just because my father happens to be well known. What I want to do is to make my own way and not pose as the family pet. At Uncle Tom's lower ranch I'm pulling down fifty dollars a month, and Hoover, the foreman, says I earn every cent of it. Emmet K. isn't the fellow to push a man ahead just because the man happens to be his son. And I'm glad of it. I wish you'd tell anybody who gets curious about me that, so far as Emmet K. is concerned, I'm just his brother's hired man; and no more to him, in a business way, than the other hired men in his employ. Will you do that?"

"I will; glad to do it!" assured the conductor vehemently. "You're the right sort, Mr. Ruthven," he added approvingly, and got up as the train slowed for the next station.

Seventeen was due in Dry Wash at half past two, but owing to the delays

it did not arrive until four o'clock. Ruthven, when he stepped down from the train, found himself in a town not much larger than Bluffton. He watched while a few packages were thrown out of the express car and gathered up by a man in overalls. Among the parcels was the one for Barton. The man carried his load to a store building across the street from the railroad station, and Ruthven followed him.

A sign outside the store bore the legend: "B. Grandy, General Merchandise." Hanging to this sign were two others, one reading "Post Office," and the other "Express Office." The post office was partitioned off next one of the front windows, and the express office was just back of it on the same side of the store.

The man in overalls dumped his load behind the express-office counter, and a youth of sixteen or seventeen came in with a very slim mail bag and disappeared behind a barricade of letter boxes. A young woman in a calico gown was waiting on a customer in the rear of the establishment. These three, the man, the youth, and the girl, evidently comprised the working force.

"I wish you'd put that package for Thomas Barton on the scales, Mr. Grandy," said Ruthven, leaning over the counter.

The man in overalls looked up, and his faded blue eyes filled with suspicion. "What business is it o' yours?" he inquired.

"None at all; but I think the package is overweight, and I am rather interested in seeing it weighed. I'm from Ranch Two, and Mr. Barton is my uncle."

This statement did not impress Grandy. He piled up the Barton package with the rest of the incoming express matter and made no move to put it on the scales.

"When will that package go out to

the ranch?" Ruthven inquired, taking another tack.

"It won't go out to-day," was the answer, "'cause Nate Wylie is down with mountain fever. He was shakin' like all get out when he made his trip to town yesterday. Nate does the hauling between Dry Wash and the ranch. Somebody else, I reckon, will drive the wagon to-morrow."

"If you'll let me receipt for the package I'll get a horse and take it out to Uncle Tom this afternoon."

"Not by a jugful," returned Grandy. "Mebby that package is vallyble, and mebby you're a confidence man. Never seen you before. Somebody I know from the ranch gits this piece o' freight, and not any stranger."

"All right," said Ruthven cheerfully. "Is there a hotel I can stop at until some one comes in from the ranch? I want to ride out there with the man who does the freighting."

"The hotel is right next to this store," was the reply. "They'll take care o' you for the night." Ruthven then went out. "I don't like the way that feller acts," went on Grandy to the girl, who had finished waiting on the customer and had walked toward the front door.

"You're foolish, pop," she answered. "I haven't ever seen a finer-looking young man than he is. What did he say his name was?"

"He didn't say. All he told me was that Tom Barton was his uncle. Anybody could drop in here and say that. Now I'll put that package on the scales jest to satisfy myself."

He did so. "Gosh!" he exclaimed. "It's marked six pounds and weighs ten. I—"

"Weighs ten, eh?" called a voice from the platform in front of the open door.

Grandy looked up to see the smiling face of Ruthven. The latter, still smiling, turned and vanished past the window. "Talk about nerve!" grumbled

Grandy. "Now I know he ain't square."

At the hotel Ruthven was given a pleasant welcome. He was shown to a comfortable room, and after a while was supplied with a good supper. That night he slept like a top, undisturbed by any apprehensions or surmises about either the Barton package or Weasel Morrison. When he came down to breakfast next morning, the landlord handed him a newspaper as he started into the dining room.

"It's a daily from Helena," the landlord explained, "and just got here."

Ruthven seated himself at the table, ordered ham and eggs, buckwheat cakes and coffee, and began reading while he waited for his breakfast. A moment later his eye caught a headline: "Big Scare at Burt City!" And below that line was this: "Division Superintendent Durfee Holds Up a Train to Look for Infernal Machine and Finds Pair of Boots."

Ruthven whistled in astonishment; then he began to read, forgetting all about his breakfast.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PAIR OF SIX-GUNS.

THE article was not a long one, but some enterprising press association had evidently got hold of the facts and telegraphed them all over the State. Very likely Durfee and Harrington, in view of the failure of their expedition to make good their fears, had released the information they had been keeping to themselves. If so, on reading that press report they must have regretted taking the public into their confidence. The paper treated the affair as a huge joke.

Not often is it the lot of a pair of boots to throw a scare into the division superintendent of a railroad and the traveling agent of an express company, and yet that is precisely what a pair of tan bluchers with eight-

een-inch tops did to Messrs. Durfee and Harrington. Furthermore, on account of those boots a passenger train was held up for an hour until it could be overtaken by a special, and one entire division of a railroad experienced an attack of cold chills and was generally set by the ears. Messrs. Durfee and Harrington had an idea that the package containing the boots contained a clockwork bomb, and it seemed necessary for the two to overhaul the package in person before the boots exploded!

Here followed a brief and more or less serious account of the wild pursuit of Seventeen by the party in the way car, and of the overpowering relief experienced by Durfee and Harrington when they found the tan bluchers in the package instead of an infernal machine. And then came this illuminating bit:

Two weeks ago a package was received by the express agent in Monte Carlo, Montana. It weighed three pounds when the agent took it in, and the weight had jumped to five pounds when he sent it out. In some way a clock of peculiar construction had been smuggled into the package, for the messenger heard a ticking inside, and the agent vows there was no such ticking while the package was being taken over the counter. Be this as it may, the innocent-appearing parcel "let go" in the town of Duane, making kindling of one perfectly good express car, but, fortunately and miraculously, injuring no one, not even the messenger. Durfee and Harrington had this matter in mind when they started in pursuit of the boots. In the circumstances, they are excusable. But suppose the package had really contained a bomb, and that the bomb had exploded while the passenger train was waiting at the Bluffton station to be overhauled. In that event, Durfee might have been sorry he had not wired the messenger to throw the package from the car with a pair of tongs while No. 17 proceeded on about its business.

"Jupiter!" murmured Ruthven as he laid aside his paper and started in on his breakfast. "So that was the reason for Harrington's rush for the superintendent's office, and the chase after Seventeen! The explanation of the cause of that fiasco, however, doesn't shed a ray of light upon the true mystery of that Barton package. Its weight be-

comes plus or minus at any old time and without rhyme or reason. The package has never been investigated, so far as I know, when it weighed more than six pounds. I wish I could have persuaded Grandy to turn it over to me. Possibly I can get a chance at it when the man comes in to take it out to the ranch."

When he had finished his breakfast, Ruthven went out on the hotel porch and seated himself in a comfortable chair. Weasel Morrison was much in his mind, and likewise Lois McKenzie. These two presented a baffling problem, and the more his mind dwelt upon their ride together from Williamsburg to Burt City the more bewildered he became.

He was still struggling in the mental mire when a mountain wagon, drawn by two fiery, half-tamed bronchos, came racing down the street. There was only one man in the wagon—a cowboy by the look of him—and he had the lines wrapped around his hands and was sawing them back and forth.

One horse appeared to be trying desperately to leap over the other. The driver was shouting all the time, and what he said was very expressive of the state of his feelings. He managed to guide the team to the hitching pole in front of Grandy's establishment. There one broncho tried to go into the store while its mate made an unsuccessful attempt to climb a telegraph pole.

"You, Ginger!" whooped the driver. "Say, I got a blame' good notion to skin ye alive. Pete, you mouse-colored, no-account son o' the Ole Nick, if I had you to the ranch I'd stand you on your bloomin' head. Whoa now, consarn ye!"

He fell out of the wagon, gathered himself up, and finally managed to get the team hitched. Then he got on the platform, pulled off his wide-brimmed hat, and mopped his brow with a handkerchief.

"Those bronks are kind of festive, eh, William?" remarked Grandy, appearing in the store door.

"You might call it that, Grandy," was the aggrieved reply, "and you might call it pure cussedness. Them two was only broke to saddle last fall, and to harness this spring. Not before this morning was they ever hitched together. They're real unsociable, seems like."

"How's Nate Wylie?"

"Sick abed. I had to come to town in his place. Old man's feet are botherin' him a heap, and he says by now you ort to have a pair o' boots he ordered from Burt City more'n a month ago. He can't wear nothin' but a certain kind o' footgear, and the last pair he got from Burt City would be all right yet a while if some thievin' four-footed critter hadn't got away with one of 'em. I allow it's Sam Haynes' coyote dog, but we can't prove it on the animile. With only half the old pair left, Barton's got to have the new ones. Have they come?"

"There's a package here, and I allow it's just about the size to hold a pair of boots. But it's awful heavy, William."

"Light or heavy, I got to put right back with that package. Put a bag o' flour, a side o' bacon, and a case o' termaters in the wagon. I'll get the package and what mail there is, and hustle to run out the return trail."

"Why don't you drive a team that's got some respect for you, William?"

"Well, the old man wants Ginger and Pete to git used to each other, and so he put it up to me to drive 'em to town. I'll bet they'll know somebody's behind 'em before we get back to the Musselshell! I've stood about all them didoes I'm goin' to."

William went into the store, and Grandy followed him. "Here's the man I'm waiting for," thought Ruthven, "and I'll ride with him out to the ranch."

He went into the hotel and paid his bill; then he walked over to Grandy's to interview William. The latter was standing by the counter of the express department, tucking several letters and papers into the pocket of his coat and eying, with some concern, the package that lay in front of him. The store assistant was carrying out the provisions and putting them in the wagon.

"Just charge that extra express to Barton, Grandy," William was saying. "I ain't got a red with me."

"Sure," agreed Grandy.

"Are you from Tom Barton's ranch?" inquired Ruthven, stepping up to the cowboy.

The latter looked around, measured the speaker with keen eyes, and apparently was favorably impressed. "I am," he answered.

"My name's Ruthven——"

The other's eye brightened. "Lewis Ruthven?" he asked.

"Yes. I reached town last night and want to get to the Musselshell. May I ride with you?"

"Well, I guess!" William backed away and continued to stare at Ruthven. "So you're the cimiroon that laid out Big Eph, huh? That bully and I come together oncet when I was down at the lower ranch, and I couldn't work for all of a week arterward. You back-heeled him, they say, and tipped him headfirst into a water trough; then you pulled him out o' the trough and pounded his head agin' the side o' the cookhouse, cleanin' up on him complete. A lot of us didn't allow they was a man in Montana could do it. You're Emmet K.'s son, all right. Shake! My name's Martin, Bill Martin. I'm sure glad to meet up with the man that trimmed Big Eph."

This was the first intimation Ruthven had had that his differences with Big Eph had traveled so far. But he was glad, if the reports had won him the good will of Martin.

"He's right husky for an Easterner," remarked Grandy to Martin. "I reckoned Emmet K.'s son would be more pampered like, sort of run to seed with luxury and the good things o' life; but this man looks like the real goods."

Ruthven laughed. "Going right back to the ranch, Martin?" he queried.

"Right off. I got some boots here for the old man, and he's frettin' for 'em. I s'pose you got about three trunks, four grips, and a foldin' bathtub, hey? Git 'em loaded, then, and we'll hike."

"I'm traveling light this trip. All I've got with me is what I stand in."

"Bully for you! Come on!"

Martin picked up the package, took it out on the platform, and tossed it into the wagon. As it slammed into the wagon box, the startled bronchos made another attempt to get into the store and to climb the telegraph pole.

"Ain't it scandalous the way them critters act?" asked Martin in profound disgust. "I reckon we'll have to maneuvrer some in gittin' 'em unhitched and headed along the out trail. You climb in and take the lines while I cast off."

Ruthven obeyed. Martin got the hitching straps loose, and then, the instant they were freed and before he could get into the wagon, the team jumped for the middle of the street. They did not go far, however, before Ruthven stopped them by main strength. He did it so well that Martin complimented him in glowing terms and scrambled into the seat beside him.

"You'd nacherly think," said Martin, taking the reins, "that fifteen mile of runnin' from the ranch to town would smooth the kinks out of them; but no, they're just beginnin' to feel their oats. Keep your eye on the stuff in the rear and I'll let the cusses flicker. Hike, you heathens!" he added, with a yell, and away went the team on the jump.

At least three miles of trail were

covered before the bronchos showed any signs of lessening their speed. After that, by degrees, they slowed to a more comfortable pace. Ruthven reached around and picked up the package. It was still at its top weight, so far as he could judge.

"I'd like to open this and take a look at the boots, Martin," said Ruthven.

"That wouldn't be accordin' to league rules, would it?" the cowboy answered. "The package is Barton's."

"I'm just curious, that's all. This package formed my main reason for coming to Dry Wash," and he briefly explained about the mysterious differences in weight which the parcel exhibited from time to time.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Martin. "That sounds like fool talk. But you can see what's inside just as soon as we git to where we're goin'. Your uncle's plumb anxious about them boots, and he'll open the package the minute he gets his hands on it. It wouldn't be the proper caper for you and me to open it. You don't really think that package gits heavier and lighter all by itself, do you?"

"I don't know what to think. I've been guessing about the matter good and hard. I—"

Right there he broke off his remarks suddenly. A man had jumped out from behind a clump of brush at the roadside, and the horses had halted so abruptly that the wagon almost ran over them. The man had a cap pulled down over his eyes, and his coat collar turned up about his ears, and he was leveling two large and businesslike revolvers. Between the bronchos' heads he had a clear and comprehensive view of the pair on the seat of the mountain wagon. One weapon was trained upon Martin, and the other upon Ruthven.

"What d'you know about that!" exclaimed the startled cowboy. "Neighbor, are you tryin' to stick us up? If

you are you'll find poor pickin', so far as this hits me."

Another man, his face similarly covered, emerged from the brush and started toward the wagon.

"You got a package there for Tom Barton?" said the man with the guns. "If you have, toss it over. I need a pair of boots myself."

Just at that moment Ginger and Pete had some frenzied fancies, and undertook maneuvers both startling and unexpected. They jumped forward and sideways, and Ruthven's heels went into the air and he turned a back somersault into the rear of the wagon. What Martin was doing, at the same time, he was in no position to determine.

CHAPTER IX.

FOLLOWING UP SUSPICIONS.

ONE event followed another so rapidly that Ruthven could not keep track of them. He realized dimly that the horses were running away and that he was being bounced around in the back part of the wagon in imminent danger of going overboard. He had vague, uncertain glimpses of a bag of flour, a case of tomatoes, and a side of bacon dancing in the air; and then, after a few seconds of this demoralizing experience, something like an earthquake took hold of the mountain wagon and shook it as a terrier shakes a rat.

Following this, the storm gave way to a fearsome calm. Ruthven was dizzy and dazed. The first thing he comprehended was that he was no longer in swift and violent motion. He sat up, and, by degrees, took firmer hold of his unsteady faculties. Under him was the hard earth, and all around lay fragments of the mountain wagon. A wheel, beautifully smashed, was within easy reach of his hand. An axle stuck out of the ground a few yards off, with another wheel, fairly intact, on its upper end. The boards that had formed the

box had been wrenched one from another and were scattered hither and yon. A little way off, at the side of the trail, lay a large boulder. It was the reef on which the wagon had been wrecked.

Ruthven, after making sure that he had escaped with only a few minor bruises and contusions, arose to his feet and looked along the trail for the horses. They were not in sight. Facing the other way, he tried to discover some trace of the two holdup men. This was equally fruitless. In the middle distance, however, something moved which upon investigation proved to be William Martin. He was on the ground and struggling to get rid of the dashboard, through which he had run his head to the shoulders.

"Are you hurt, Martin?" Ruthven asked.

"Not a hull lot, I reckon. Pull this bloomin' thing off o' me, will you?"

Ruthven removed the dashboard. "I guess the horses ran away," he remarked uselessly.

"Oh, no," jeered the cowboy, "it ain't possible! They just started for the Musselshell in a hurry and didn't stop to consider. I ain't a-wonderin' they got skeered. Them road agents certainly threw a crimp into me. What can you expect o' bronks when a reasonin' human can't put up with such doin's?"

He hoisted himself erect and gazed northward. "I reckon Ginger and Pete are halfway to the ranch by now," he went on, and turned for a look the other way. "Highwaymen ain't in sight nuther. We must be a plumb mile from where they tried to stop us." He added quizzically: "Which 'u'd you ruther be, robbed or run away with?"

"Hobson's choice, Martin," said Ruthven, with a laugh. "It was out of the frying pan and into the fire, seems to me."

"I was all right till the seat jounced

out," resumed Martin, "and when that went I went along. The ground h'isted itself and hit me an awful crack. Blamed if I know where or how I picked up the dashboard. There was a kind of blank after I come down, and when I got back to earth I was laborin' to git clear of that front end o' the wagon. I allow that vee-hick-le is beyond mendin'. This ort to convince the old man that Ginger and Pete ain't got the right dispositions to drive double, or——"

He bit off his words abruptly. "Say," he asked in trepidation, "I wonder what-all's become o' them boots?"

"We'd better hunt around and find out," suggested Ruthven. "The robbers mentioned the boots, if I remember."

"They sure did. Wasn't that a funny stunt? Holdin' us up just for nothin' but to annex the old man's footgear. Come on and let's hunt."

They went back to the boulder that had played such havoc with the wagon, but could not find the parcel in the wreckage; then, following the route taken by the runaway horses, they proceeded on and on, sharply scanning the ground as they went. The first thing they found was the box that had held the tomatoes. It was broken and empty. The cans were scattered in all directions. Later they found the flour, and presently the bacon. Then, just as they were about to lose hope, they happened upon the package. It was partly demolished. The wrapper was torn, the cord was broken, and the top of the pasteboard box was off. One of the tan bluchers had kicked through, and only its laced top lay in the original container. The other boot was with it.

"Gosh, I'm glad o' that!" breathed Martin thankfully. "I don't care a whoop about the wagon, but if anything had happened to them boots the old man would never have forgiven me."

Ruthven picked up the tan bluchers and looked them over curiously. There was nothing inside nor outside to arouse the least suspicion. He investigated the smashed pasteboard box, the torn wrapper, and even the cord. There was absolutely no clew to the mystery that had surrounded the package ever since McKenzie had passed it over the counter of the Burt City express office. At one side of the soiled and dusty wrapper Ruthven found the penciled cross which he had placed on the package for purposes of identification.

"What's on your mind?" asked Martin.

"Oh, nothing much," answered Ruthven wearily. "I've had a look inside the package when it weighed the heaviest, and all I've found is the footgear. This is enough to give a man a brain storm."

"Don't pester your mind with things you can't understand," advised the cowboy. "That's the shortest cut you can take to the crazy house. When Ginger and Pete git to the ranch some un will drive this way with another wagon to pick us up. I reckon we better collect all the freight in one place, and then sit down on it and wait."

This was a good idea. The cans of tomatoes, some of them badly dented, were gathered in and heaped in a pile, The flour was carried to the same spot, and then the bacon. On top of the plunder were placed Tom Barton's boots. While Ruthven worked he was thinking.

The man who had jumped into the road in front of the bronchos and leveled the six-guns was one whom Ruthven was confident he had never seen before. His voice had apparently not been disguised in the least, and it was strange in Ruthven's ears. But the other man, the one who had stepped out of the brush and walked toward the rear of the wagon, had somehow a familiar aspect. Without having seen

his face, his build and bearing suggested Weasel Morrison. There had been no time to consider this point before, for the excitement connected with the bolting of the bronchos had left Ruthven a trifle bewildered, and with other things on his mind. Now the matter fairly forced itself on his attention.

Morrison, jumping from Seventeen between stations, could very easily have reached Dry Wash during the previous night by another passenger train or by a freight. But why was he there, on the trail to the ranch, making an attempt to hold up Martin and relieve him of that express package? Here was a clew which, if carefully followed, might solve the mystery of that Barton shipment.

Perhaps an hour and a half after the smash a man drove from the ranch with a team and buckboard and halted near the wreck and the two who were lounging in the shade by the pile of provisions.

"Don't you-all know how to drive, William?" the newcomer inquired.

"Don't try to rub it in, Hank Double-day," growled Martin. "I reckon I've gone through a plenty without takin' any back talk from you. A couple o' road agents tried to hold us up and make off with the old man's boots."

"Go on!"

"And them long-legged trouble makers at the pole just nacherly cut loose and rambled across the landscape like a pair of skeered coyotes. That's a fact. This here," and Martin indicated the man beside him, "is Mr. Lewis Ruthven, Tom Barton's nephew from the lower ranch. He's goin' along to the Musselshell."

"I don't believe I'll go along, Martin," spoke up Ruthven.

"What!"

"Something ought to be done in the matter of those two chaps who tried to rob us. I guess I'll hoof it back to

Dry Wash and see if they can't be located."

"How'll you locate 'em? You don't know who to look for. Better pass it up and keep on to the ranch with Hank and me."

"Tell my uncle I'll see him later," Ruthven answered, getting up and starting southward. "Maybe nothing will come of this, but I think we ought to try to do something."

"Well, if you've got the bit in your teeth I won't try to head you off; but say, I'll wait here while Hank drives you back to town."

"The walk will do me good. After being knocked around in the wreck I'll feel all the better for limbering up. So long!"

He started on with a swift, steady stride, and Martin and Doubleday watched him until he was nearly out of sight.

"And that's the cimiroon who trimmed Big Eph!" muttered Doubleday. "Too blamed bad he can't get along with his daddy, and is more or less of a black sheep."

"I'm not takin' much stock in that black-sheep talk," said Martin. "I reckon Ruthven is human and has his failin's, same's the rest of us; but he's got nerve. And build! Say, Hank, did you look at the build of him? How'd you like to have him tackle you in a football scrimmage, eh? The old man said he was picked for an All-America Eleven. I don't think Barton is down on him much on account of the fuss he had with his father."

While the two cowboys continued to talk and to load the freight into the buckboard, Ruthven proceeded in the direction of town. He had not many miles to travel and was not a great while in covering them, but it was nearly two o'clock when he turned in at Grandy's store.

Grandy, of course, was surprised.

"Didn't you start for the Musselshell?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Ruthven, "but I came back. Horses ran away and strung the wagon along the road. I waited until another rig had come for Martin, and then I headed this way."

"Got all you wanted of ranch life so quick?" said Grandy, with a knowing grin.

Ruthven paid no attention to the remark. "Have you seen any strangers in town, Grandy?" he inquired.

"One," was his reply. "He's over to the hotel now."

"Much obliged," said the other, and left the store.

Could it be possible that the stranger was Weasel Morrison? If so, then the fugitive crook was playing a bold hand to come into Dry Wash and stop openly at the hotel. But that was the character of the man.

"Stranger putting up here, Atkins?" he asked of the hotel proprietor, who was sitting on the porch.

"Yes—Arthur Robinson, of Bismarck, North Dakota. He's in his room now, the room you had. I thought you had gone to Barton's ranch to—"

Ruthven did not linger to explain why he had not continued on to the ranch, but hurried through the hotel office and up the stairs to the room he had occupied the night before. He was ready to take Morrison by surprise, if the stranger really proved to be the crook masquerading under a fictitious name. He rapped on the door.

"What's wanted?" called a voice—not Morrison's voice, but another even more familiar.

Ruthven stifled an exclamation of astonishment, and turned the knob. The door was unlocked and flew open. A hatchet-faced man sprang up from a chair and stared in amaze.

"Ruthven, by thunder!" he gasped. "Lewis Ruthven, of all men in the world!"

"Hackett!" exclaimed Ruthven. "Hackett, the detective who has been after Weasel Morrison for weeks and weeks. By George, I'll bet I know why you're here!"

CHAPTER X.

GETTING ACTION.

CALL me Robinson," said the detective. "It is just as easy and won't give the snap away. When you knocked, Ruthven, I was expecting some one else. I remember now that you came to Montana from the Catskills. Got fired from the School of Mines because you stayed so long in the East helping Millyar. Your kindness was a sort of boomerang, eh? Never mind—don't get hot. Queer that you should run in on me like this. How did you know I was in this hotel?"

"I didn't know it," answered Ruthven. "I can't say that I really expected to find Weasel Morrison in this room, but I rather hoped that is what would happen."

"Why Morrison?"

"You're here looking for him, aren't you? Haven't you been chasing him ever since he skipped out of the Catskills?"

"Don't publish it, anyhow," said the detective. "There are other things Weasel Morrison has done that make that job in the Catskills look like the work of a piker. For weeks he has known I was after him, and yet he has sown a trail of crime all over the West. I've come within an ace of landing on him half a dozen times, but he always wriggles through. He's the smoothest cracksman at large in this country today."

"Why," continued the detective, "he has invented a kit of tools that would enable him, single-handed, to open the vaults of the subtreasury. Other crooks want tools made on the same pattern, and Morrison bleeds them well for du-

plicate instruments. The Weasel, with these devilish inventions, has helped more of his kind into burglar-proof safes than the police can count. I want to catch that 'gun,' and I want to catch him with his patent kit. To capture Morrison and not the tools would be only half a job; to get hold of both would be the slickest clean-up that was ever pulled off, would mean a lot for law and order, and incidentally would jump yours truly into the king row."

"Now," Hackett went on, changing the subject briskly, "why did you think Weasel Morrison might be in this room?"

Ruthven seated himself; then he began telling of the ride from Burt City to Bluffton with Durfee, to overtake Seventeen. The detective smiled. "I read about that," he interjected. Ruthven continued with the account of how he had seen Morrison's face at a car window as Seventeen was leaving Bluffton, how he had boarded the train, and how an attempt had been made to rob the express car between Bluffton and Okaday.

"Knew about that, too," struck in the detective. The other proceeded with his recital, and briefly recounted the attempted holdup on the trail to Barton's upper ranch, and followed with a statement of his suspicions concerning one of the robbers.

"That was why I returned to Dry Wash instead of going on to the Musselshell," he finished. "I heard when I got back that there was a stranger in town, and that he was occupying this particular room in the hotel. So I came up."

Ruthven had done his talking without the slightest reference to the mysterious Barton package. That was quite apart from the detective's work, he reasoned, and it was not necessary to start a bootless discussion.

Hackett had bitten off the end of a

cigar, and was lighting it as Ruthven ended his remarks. Surrounding himself with smoke, the criminal hunter drew into his shell of reflection and remained there for several absorbing minutes.

Finally he came out of it to say: "I came to Dry Wash hot after Morrison. He thought he had shaken me in Bismarck, North Dakota, I guess, but I learned he had bought a ticket for this place and was only a train or two behind him. Of course I had my doubts as to whether Morrison had really come to Dry Wash. Tickets are sometimes bought for a 'blind.' I came on, though, and went straight to the deputy sheriff in this place. There I connected with surprise number one." The detective knocked the ash off his cigar, and then resumed: "Jenkins, the deputy sheriff, had an anonymous letter from Burt City telling him to warn every Dry Wash man with money in his safe to be on guard, and that a cracksmen named Weasel Morrison was loose in these parts with criminal intent. As a rule, anonymous letters never appeal to me; but, in the circumstances, this one did. Jenkins is prowling around now looking for Morrison. The Weasel knows me, so I am lying low and waiting for the deputy to report. From this you will see that your information comes in mighty pat. We're closing in on the crook, and I believe we're going to get him. Do you want to help?"

"How will the capture of Morrison affect Howard Millyar?" queried Ruthven anxiously. "Millyar is trying to live down that Catskills affair, but if the whole story was published broadcast—"

"It won't be," cut in the detective. "Morrison will be brought to book for a crime committed in Montana. He'll not go back East."

Ruthven's face cleared of worry.

"Then I want to help," said he. "What can I do?"

"Just tell me where you're going to be, so I can get you in a hurry, if necessary. Don't come near me any more. Just flock by yourself, and when I need your assistance I'll let you know."

"All right," agreed Ruthven. "I shall be right here in this hotel." He got up and started for the door.

"You're living in Burt City?" queried the detective.

"On a ranch near there."

"Have you any idea who it was sent that anonymous letter to Jenkins?"

"No."

"Keep turning it over in your mind and see if you can guess. The information might prove important."

Ruthven thereupon left the room. Having missed his dinner, he was hungry enough to do more than justice to a good supper. After the meal he went to his room and stretched out on his bed. He was thinking of the anonymous letter, and somehow coupling it with the talk Lois McKenzie had had with Weasel Morrison between Williamsburg and Burt City. Was it possible that Lois had written that unsigned communication? He could not believe it. He was glad, however, that he had not mentioned the girl's name in his talk with the detective.

About nine o'clock he undressed and got into his blankets. It was morning, just about dawn, when he was aroused by a soft tap on his door. "Who's there?" he called. No voice answered, but the tapping continued. Leaping out of bed, he opened the door and found the detective in the hall.

"Dress as quickly as you can," said the detective, "and come down. We've got our man trapped. We may not need you, but there's a man with Morrison, and I think it's just as well to have you along."

Hackett paused for no further words, and Ruthven, in some excitement, be-

gan hustling into his clothes. When he got downstairs he found the detective and another man on the porch, waiting.

"Jenkins, this is Mr. Ruthven," said the detective. "We can depend on him."

Jenkins nodded. Without speaking, he left the porch and started up the walk. The detective, with a jerk of the head, indicated that Ruthven was to follow. The deputy sheriff walked briskly, and led the way into a sparsely built-up street where the houses faced the railroad tracks. He stopped before a two-story frame structure which was badly in need of paint.

"We'll go in at the rear," said he in a low tone to the detective. "I've arranged for that door to be left open. We'd better leave Ruthven outside to watch—the two of us will be needed inside."

"Correct," answered Hackett. "Get that, Ruthven?"

"Yes," answered the one-time half back; "but I'd like to be where there's something going on. I don't want to pose as a figurehead."

"You're not prepared, and things might go hard with you at close quarters. Keep your eyes skinned, so that if one of the men tries to slip away you can stop him."

Jenkins had quietly opened a kitchen door, and the detective trailed after him. The door closed, and for a few moments there was silence within the house. Then, all at once, a wild commotion started. A struggle was going on, furniture crashed, the whole house seemed to shiver and shake, husky voices cried out angrily, and above all arose the wild, terrified scream of a woman.

Ruthven's ears were keen, and while the disorder was at its height there came to him a sharp scraping against clapboards around the corner of the house. Darting in that direction, he

observed a man in shirt and trousers, barefooted and bareheaded, racing toward the railroad tracks. It was Weasel Morrison, and he was carrying a satchel as he ran. He had dropped from an upper window, and apparently had eluded successfully the two officers in the building.

"Stop!" shouted Ruthven, immediately taking up the pursuit.

Morrison cast a quick glance over his shoulder, and his sinister face darkened. He must have recognized Ruthven, and realized that he owed him an old score. He did not stop, of course; on the contrary, he gathered himself in for a fresh burst of speed. He was aiming for the end of the little freight depot, and was dashing along the side of a big stock pen.

Ruthven, in spite of his size, was a crack sprinter. Many a time he had come down the field like a limited express train, with the pigskin under his arm, crashing through the interference and showing clean heels to all who came behind. His legs had not lost much of their speed, and now he was gaining upon Morrison at every jump. He was not more than ten yards in the rear when the fleeing crook vanished around the corner of the freight depot.

"I've got him!" thought Ruthven exultantly.

But he had to revise this opinion. When he, in his turn, whirled around the corner of the freight building, Morrison was just piling upon a velocipede car which stood on the rails. Opposite the car stood a pole that held a target. A railroad employee was at the top of the pole making repairs. The little car belonged to him, and he was yelling dire things at Morrison.

The crook paid no attention. Throwing off the supplies that lay on a small platform back of the "speeder's" seat, he placed his satchel where it would be safe and bent to the foot pedals and handlebars.

Ruthven had trained his mind to quick action on many a hard-fought field. Now his wits worked with lightning rapidity. On foot he never could overhaul Morrison, with the speeder rushing along the clicking steel. How was he to follow with any hope of success?

He flashed a keen look around. Near the depot was a small shanty in which the section gang stored a hand car and tools. The shanty was open. There were no laborers about, but the hand car had been pushed out on the main track.

In six jumps Ruthven had reached the car. Running with it for a few yards, he gave it a start and then leaped upon it and caught the handlebars. At once he began to work with all his might, lifting and falling with the bars, and urging the car into a wild clip.

There was to be a race between the hand car and the speeder. Ruthven felt that he had never been in better trim to put up a good fight. And he still felt sure that he was going to lay hands on Weasel Morrison.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FAMOUS KIT.

AMILE east of Dry Wash the single track crossed a bridge. It was a long bridge and spanned a river that ran between wide, deep banks. Ruthven had hoped he might overtake Weasel Morrison before the chase brought them to the bridge, but he soon saw that the hope was not to be realized. The hand car was gaining upon the lighter speeder, because of the superior strength applied to the levers. The gain, however, was slow.

When Morrison was close to the end of the bridge, Ruthven, who was lifting and bending to his work with clock-like regularity, saw him hurl the satchel from the speeder into the bushes on the river bank. This seemed a very

queer move for Morrison to make, and it was only by a chance that the man behind saw anything of it. The next moment the speeder was upon the bridge, and a little later the hand car rumbled out upon it. Perhaps half a minute afterward fate played a high card and brought that flight and pursuit to an unexpected termination.

Morrison, in great excitement, suddenly applied the brakes and brought the speeder to a quick stop. In the utmost alarm he piled off the velocipede and started to run back toward the western bank of the river. A view of Ruthven, rushing down upon him, caused him to pause.

For a brief space Ruthven marveled at these weird actions of the crook. Then, as a roar and rattle dinned in his ears above the rumble of the hand car, it flashed through his mind that a train was coming from the east. The approach of the train was screened by a bluff shoulder of rock beyond the end of the bridge, but that it was dangerously close there could be no doubt.

Morrison had been nearly two-thirds of the way across when he had halted the speeder, and Ruthven, as he bore down with all his weight on the foot brake, was nearly halfway over. Morrison, following an instant of indecision, whirled to make for the eastern bank of the river. Evidently he preferred taking chances with the oncoming train than with Ruthven. He was too late in executing this change of plan, however, for he had barely started his retreat when the nose of the engine pushed into sight around the curtain of rock.

Consternation seized Ruthven. The bridge was scarcely more than a trestle, and beyond the ends of the ties on either side there was nothing but space and the waters below. At intervals beams jutted out from the bridge, each beam supporting a barrel of water for emergency in case of fire. To get out

on one of those beams while the train rushed past would not have called for any unusual amount of nerve, but both the men were trapped midway between the beams, which were some fifty feet apart.

It was possible that Ruthven could have gained the nearest water barrel; yet, if he had been able to make it, he feared that the hand car, on being tossed from the track, might strike him. One expedient after another flashed through his mind while deep, wild blasts of warning came from the whistle of the locomotive.

Morrison, cool enough now that the first shock of alarm had passed, jumped to the ends of the ties and lowered himself so that he swung by his arms beneath the bridge. This was the only course to take that promised safety, and Ruthven had already decided upon it. He, too, gripped the end of a tie and dangled above the water.

The bridge was shaking under the rushing weight of the train. It was a fast freight. Two crashes in quick succession could be heard as the pilot struck the speeder and the hand car, hurling both clear of the bridge and far out into the river. The freight had almost passed when Morrison slipped from his hold and shot downward.

Ruthven could have held on, and drawn himself back to safety after the caboose had gone by! If he did this, however, he feared that Morrison might escape. Giving his body an outward swing, he let go the tie and fell.

He succeeded in turning himself in mid-air so that he made a fairly good dive into the water. Down and down he went into the churning waters, and when he came to the surface and cleared his eyes he could see Morrison swimming powerfully for the western bank. The other bank was so steep for a long distance that a landing there was impossible. Ruthven struck out in the wake of the crook.

The Weasel held the advantage in this that he was lightly clad. Ruthven, incumbered with all his clothes, had the harder fight. But he was the better swimmer and held his own in the race for the bank. Morrison got ashore first and dragged himself clear of the slime and ooze at the river's margin. His scanty apparel clung to his limbs, and his hair hung down over his face and eyes. He pushed back his drenched locks, gave one look over his shoulder, and began hurrying toward the railroad track.

Ruthven was nearly water-logged as he came out of the river. He had kept all his clothes but his hat, and the water squirted from his soggy shoes as he walked. "Halt, Morrison!" he yelled. "You can't get away!"

The crook flung back a shout of defiance and continued on toward the high bank leading to the bridge approach. Ruthven made after him, trailing small rivers of water as he went. His clothes may have been dampened, but his ardor for the chase was in nowise diminished.

At the bushes which covered the railroad embankment, Morrison paused. Ruthven saw him drop to his knees and draw into sight the satchel he had flung from the speeder. Opening the satchel, Morrison reached into it and jerked forth a small revolver. Springing up, he whirled and lifted the weapon.

No more than a dozen feet separated the two men. "You halt!" Morrison cried. "You've butted into my plans once too often, Ruthven. You are the only one between me and liberty, and I've sworn I shall never see the inside of the 'pen'!"

Bang! went the revolver. Ruthven stood unscathed, although the range was well-night point-blank. *Bang, bang, bang!* Four times Morrison pressed the trigger, and still the big half back remained erect, himself wondering why he sustained no mortal hurt.

Morrison cursed and flung aside the

useless weapon. Facing about, he attempted to claw his way up the brushy bank, but Ruthven was upon him in short order. Gripped in each other's hands, the two rolled about, and then Ruthven came uppermost and held his man helpless in fingers of steel.

Just then there was a sound of voices accompanying a scramble of feet, and Ruthven looked around to see four men hastening toward them. Two of them were the detective and the deputy sheriff; the other two evidently were from the freight train.

"He's got him!" cried Hackett jubilantly. "By thunder, Ruthven has got him!"

"Pretty nifty, I call that!" exclaimed Jenkins.

"They had a blamed close call," said one of the trainmen. "I wouldn't have been in their boots a few minutes back for a cool million. They dropped into the river and swam out, eh? But how in blazes did they come to be on the bridge with that hand car and speeder?"

"It's all right," explained Jenkins. "The smaller chap is a notorious crook, and this other man here is after him. The man is Weasel Morrison, and he did that job at Monte Carlo. We had him and a pal bottled up at Jennifer's boarding house in Dry Wash, and Morrison slipped away from us. Ruthven followed him."

"Good work!" approved the conductor of the freight. "If he's the tinhorn that blew up the express car. See that he's put through for it, that's all."

"Get up, Ruthven," said the detective as he and the deputy halted beside the two on the ground. "He's ours now, and we'll take care of him. Jupiter, but you're as wet as a drowned rat! Fine business, though!"

Ruthven released Morrison and arose to his feet. Hackett bent down and pulled the prisoner's wrists together. *Click, click!* came a sharp staccato

double note, and the crook's hands were secured with steel bracelets.

"There you are, Weasel Morrison!" chuckled Jenkins, gripping the prisoner's arms and hoisting him erect by main strength.

"Thank your old friend Ruthven for this," put in the detective. "Your pal, Toby Lane, is a prisoner, too. You might call this a clean sweep. Bolting from Jennifer's didn't do you much good, after all, eh?"

Morrison stood sullenly between the two officers, a melancholy figure in his wet garments. Ruthven picked up the revolver and was examining it.

"We heard the shots," said Jenkins. "He did it, I suppose? None of the bullets reached you?"

Ruthven laughed. "There were no bullets, Jenkins," he answered. "If there had been I'd not be here now. Two cartridges are left in the cylinder —*and they are blanks.*"

"Blanks?" queried the detective incredulously. "In a canister belonging to Weasel Morrison?"

"Show 'em to me!" barked the prisoner in sudden wrath.

The detective took the weapon from Ruthven's hand, "broke" it, and removed one of the two remaining cartridges. These he showed to Morrison, watching his face curiously the while. The face twisted with demoniacal fury.

"Queered!" he fumed. "Queered by that——" He broke off, and his voice died in a fierce muttering. "Who tipped me off, Hackett?" he demanded. The detective was silent. "I know!" the prisoner went on. "And I'll get even. It was Arlo McKenzie, of Burt City; McKenzie, the respectable and highly honored member of the Montana legislature; the junior partner in the firm of Long & McKenzie. I'll nail *his* hide to the barn. You hear me! I warned him what would happen if he tried to give me the dirty end of this, and now

he'll get what's coming. It wasn't Ruthven who laid me by the heels; it was McKenzie."

He faced the detective. "Take me back to Monte Carlo, Hackett," he went on, "but take me by way of Burt City. I want to stop there long enough to face McKenzie. I can tell you things about McKenzie neither you nor any one else in these parts ever dreamed of. You'll want to hear it, Hackett." He swung around to get Ruthven under his venomous, flaming eyes. "You'll get to Burt City ahead of us. Go to McKenzie and tell him I'm on his trail. That's all. Warn him to pull out—to drop everything and pull out—before I get there."

"You can't hurt Arlo McKenzie," said Jenkins.

"We'll see," answered Morrison. "Come on—get me away from here. I want to get into some dry clothes."

He moved away, drawing Jenkins along with him. The detective would also have left the place had Ruthven not pointed to the bushes.

"There's a satchel in there," remarked Ruthven. "Morrison threw it off the speeder as we neared the bridge. When he got out of the river he came this way, found the satchel, and took that gun out of it. Maybe there's something else in the grip that you'll find important."

"Another one for you, Ruthven!" grunted Morrison.

Hackett went to the brush, picked up the satchel, found it was unlocked, and looked into it. Then he gave a shout of delight.

"It's the famous kit!" he exclaimed. "The patent burglar tools! Of course Morrison threw them off the speeder when there was a possibility of his being captured. Could you blame him? Finding this kit makes our morning's work complete. Not until now have these things ever been found in the Weasel's possession. It means a lot,

Ruthven. In the past Morrison has been mighty clever in dodging responsibility for this criminal outfit, but here he is *caught with the goods!* Now let's get the train back. We're delaying these men here."

CHAPTER XII.

A VISIT OF FRIENDSHIP.

ONE inconvenience about traveling light, as Ruthven had traveled from Burt City to Dry Wash, was this: that he had to go to bed at the hotel while his wearing apparel was being dried and put into shape. Ever since hurrying to the Burt City railroad station with Summerfield, on the telephone request of Harrington, Ruthven had been entirely the creature of chance.

Again and again he had changed his plans, as one fresh development after another presented itself. Now he had made up his mind to defer calling at Barton's upper ranch and to return by first train to Burt City. He was urged to this by Weasel Morrison's dark threats against McKenzie. To guard against any possibility of trouble, Ruthven thought it better to acquaint the junior partner with what had happened.

"I'm blest if I know what the Weasel has at the back of his head," said the detective, dropping into Ruthven's room while he was waiting for his clothes. "He is crazy mad at this man McKenzie, and he'll do him dirt if he can. Maybe Morrison's hatching up something to put over on an innocent man. We can't tell about that. I'm going to take him to Monte Carlo, for we have him cinched for that job, and on the way I guess we'll stop off at Burt City. There may be something important for me to know in this McKenzie matter. It's just as well to probe it, anyhow."

"If Morrison is hatching up anything," declared Ruthven, "it is all a

tissue of lies. Why, McKenzie is a member of the legislature and a man of high social standing, respected by all who know him. Morrison is of the underworld, and not in McKenzie's class at all. I don't see why you should stop off with Morrison and call on McKenzie. Just the looks of the thing ought to keep you from making such a move."

"Morrison says McKenzie's daughter met him on the train between Williamsburg and Burt City. Do you know anything about that?" .

"The conductor of Seventeen, Leason, told me something about it," answered Ruthven reluctantly.

"That looks as though there might be something between Morrison and McKenzie, doesn't it? I'm going to see what sort of a game Morrison is trying to play, anyhow. We'll take the afternoon train to-morrow. That will suit me best."

"And I'm taking the first train in the morning."

"You'll see McKenzie?"

"Certainly. His daughter is a fine girl and a friend of some very good friends of mine. I wish you'd reconsider, Hackett, and not get off at Burt City with this rascally prisoner of yours."

"That's all right, Ruthven," said the detective. "It's a good thing to let Weasel Morrison say to McKenzie's face whatever he's got to say about him. Lies can be nailed in that way quicker than in any other. If McKenzie sent that anonymous letter to Jenkins, tipping off the Weasel's game, then he must have had some secret source of information. I'm going to find out what it is."

Hackett's determination to get off the eastbound train at Burt City was inflexible, and Ruthven yielded the point. After all, he would get to McKenzie several hours before the detective and Morrison could reach him, and he could

at least prepare the man for what was to come.

In the afternoon Ruthven bought a new hat at Grandy's, and in the gray dawn of the following morning he went down to the railroad station, boarded the train, and started back toward Burt City. The train was No. 6, and was due at Burt City at eight-thirty. It was the same train Lois had taken when she went to Williamsburg and rode back on Seventeen with Weasel Morrison.

When he disembarked at his destination, Ruthven dropped into a restaurant for a late breakfast. Avoiding the express office, and a discussion with Summerfield that might consume too much time, he proceeded straight to The Emporium. The senior partner greeted him with a wide and quizzical smile.

"You didn't stay with our little party t'other day, eh, Mr. Ruthven?" he said.

"No," was the reply. "I'd like to see Mr. McKenzie."

"He's stayin' home to-day—hasn't been feelin' real prime for some sort of a while. A little rest is what he needs, and I'm goin' to see that he gets it. How big was that package of Barton's when you seen it last?" Long chuckled. "Still growin'?"

"It was delivered—Tom Barton got his boots," and, with this, Ruthven hastily departed and made for McKenzie's house.

Lois answered his rap at the front door. Her eyes were red, as though she had been weeping, but she made a brave attempt to appear like herself.

"Will you step in, Mr. Ruthven?" she invited.

He entered the hall, left his hat there, and was ushered into a pleasant sitting room and given a comfortable chair. The silence was broken by the monotonous ticking of a clock and the occasional piping of a canary. A big gray cat arose from a cushion, surveyed the visitor with leisurely interest, and then

lay down again. The surroundings were all very neat and homelike, and now that Ruthven had come to the point of his errand he was conscious of a growing constraint.

"I wanted to see your father, Miss McKenzie," said he.

She seemed to flinch, although her eyes regarded him steadily. "Is it very important?" she returned. "Father is not well and is lying down. I hate to disturb him if it is not necessary."

"It may be important, or it may not. You can be the best judge of that by telling me if you know a man named Weasel Morrison, and whether your father sent an anonymous letter to a deputy sheriff in Dry Wash warning—Miss McKenzie! Forgive me if I have startled you."

The girl had jumped forward in her chair, so shocked by his words that she gasped and pressed a hand to her throat. A chill sped through Ruthven's nerves. Lois' actions convinced him that she knew the scoundrelly Morrison, or knew of him; but his sympathies were aroused, and he started to his feet, anxious and a bit dismayed. With a fluttering hand the girl waved him back to his seat.

"Why do you ask such questions, Mr. Ruthven?" she queried, in a voice scarcely more than a whisper.

"Because," he answered sympathetically, "it may be that I can do your father a service. I want to be your friend, and his, if you will let me. What I am trying to do this morning, I feel sure, is what Miss Arnold would want me to do if she were here to speak. My motives are disinterested, entirely so, apart from the one desire to render your father a service."

There was a stir in a doorway leading to another room. Ruthven looked around to see McKenzie, clad in a dressing gown and slippers and his gaunt face like death itself, standing there.

His burning eyes were fixed upon the caller.

"Father, go back!" begged the girl. "You are not fit to be on your feet." She turned appealingly to Ruthven. "You see?" she added.

Her father, however, pushed resolutely into the room and came slowly toward a chair. "Mr. Ruthven, Lois," said he, in a tone which he strove hard to command, "is a friend. I can read that in his face, and I can see it in his actions. Let me talk with him, dear. I am no weakling"—he smiled faintly—"and I guess I know how to face trouble."

He turned to Ruthven. "I know Weasel Morrison," he went on, "and my daughter knows of him only through me. As for the rest, I am willing to acknowledge to you that I sent an anonymous letter of warning to the deputy sheriff in Dry Wash. You have something to say about Morrison, Mr. Ruthven. What is it?"

"He has been captured!"

A wild exclamation broke from the girl's lips. McKenzie dropped into the chair as though felled by a blow. A moment later the girl was perched on the arm of the chair, one arm around his neck and one hand stroking his graying hair.

"Never mind, daddy," she murmured. "Right is right, and you'll not be made to suffer. Don't let this bother you any more. We both hoped that Morrison would be captured, and we both did what we could to have it happen. If necessary, we can face the world together—and leave Burt City if we have to."

With an effort, McKenzie secured control of himself. Taking the girl's head in his hands, he drew it toward his and kissed her forehead.

"What do I care for myself, Lois?" he answered. "You are the one. I have built up an honored name as the best heritage I could leave you; and

now to have a scoundrel like Weasel Morrison undo it all is hard—hard! But, as you say, right is right, and we may come out of this better than we imagine, or hope for. I feel that the crisis is at hand. I'm glad. For years I have felt that it was coming, and there is a satisfaction in being rid of uncertainties and knowing just where I stand. I am not a coward, Lois, dear, and I know that you are not. Take your seat and be calm. It is necessary for me to talk to Mr. Ruthven."

The girl went back to her chair obediently. Her face was white, but resolute. Ruthven felt out of place. Some jealously guarded family secret had been touched upon, a secret that meant much to father and daughter, and he was sorry to have been the one to bring it partly into the light.

"Weasel Morrison was captured in Dry Wash?" McKenzie asked calmly.

"Yes," Ruthven answered. "A detective named Hackett has been trailing Morrison for weeks. He followed him to Dry Wash and called on Jenkins after the anonymous letter had been received. I had something to do with the capture that followed."

"Had Morrison committed any robbery in Dry Wash?" The words came tensely, and both McKenzie and the girl hung breathlessly upon Ruthven's answer.

"No, he was captured before he had committed any robbery there."

"Thank Heaven for that!" murmured the man, and Lois sank back in her chair in visible relief. "Were the burglar tools found?" McKenzie asked.

"Yes, the detective has them."

"I wish—I am going to give you my confidence, Mr. Ruthven, and I hope you will be as frank with me—I wish you would tell us why you did not come back with Durfee, Harrington, and the others from Bluffton. You went on with Seventeen, that carried

the package for Barton. Had you a particular reason?"

"I saw Morrison's face at a car window. I knew the man, and decided to follow him."

"Knew him?" queried McKenzie incredulously.

Ruthven told how he had encountered the Weasel in the Catskills. He went into the robbery there at some length, but carefully guarded the name of his former classmate, Howard Millyar. McKenzie and Lois read into this account something that struck a responsive chord in their own bosoms. Ruthven could see that by the swift, significant glances they exchanged.

"If you could do so much to protect a friend who was almost guilty," said McKenzie, "I am sure you will befriend me, innocent as I am and entirely a victim of circumstances. For you, Mr. Ruthven, I am going to tear in pieces the veil of mystery surrounding that express package. It goes deep; but all will come out, and I want you to have the right of it—for Lois' sake, even more than for my own." He turned to his daughter. "Please get that letter and the telegram, Lois," he requested.

The girl arose and went into another room. Ruthven fidgeted in his chair. He was uneasy, and yet he was deeply interested and curious. In what way was McKenzie concerned with the mystery of that Barton shipment? And how was Weasel Morrison involved? He was asking himself these questions when Lois returned with two sheets of paper, one white and the other yellow. With a steady hand McKenzie took them from her.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAIL OF THE WEASEL.

I SUPPOSE Weasel Morrison had something to say about me, Mr. Ruthven?" said McKenzie.

"He told me to tell you he was on

your trail," answered Ruthven, "and he made threats as to what he would do. I wanted to warn you so you could take measures to protect yourself. The officers will take Morrison to Monte Carlo to-day. They will stop off here with the prisoner, hoping the crook will make some important confession."

Lois grew rigid in her chair. Her father stared at Ruthven keenly for a moment, then tossed his hands in helpless resignation. "What time will they get here?" he asked.

"Late this afternoon."

"At that time, then, my fortunes go to smash; but I shall not be the first man to sacrifice for a principle everything that makes life worth while. The hardest thing for me to bear is the unhappiness all this must bring to Lois." He turned tenderly to his daughter. "Don't you think," he asked, "that you had better leave us while I talk frankly with Mr. Ruthven? In so far as I may, I am going to discount the revelations Morrison intends to make. What I do will not help much, and it will not be pleasant for you to stay and hear all the dreary story gone over again, Lois."

"I shall stay, father," returned the girl firmly.

McKenzie made no further objection. "Mr. Ruthven," said he, folding and unfolding the two papers in his hands, "quite a number of years ago a man whom we will call Briggs lived in a large city in the East. He was a machinist, and accounted a good one; he was married and had one child, a daughter. Hard luck came to Briggs, but through no fault of his own. Industrial depression swept the country, and he was thrown out of employment. He was dead broke, and there was no work to be had. Pawning what little property he had to keep his wife and daughter from starvation, he made his way to Chicago in the hope of finding better opportunities in the Middle West. In

this he was disappointed, and his luck went from bad to worse. Then, one night, in the fifteen-cent lodging house where he made his headquarters, he met Weasel Morrison."

McKenzie paused, his eyes fixed reflectively on space. Presently he roused himself with a start and continued: "Morrison had come to the lodging house looking for a pal whom he wanted to help in 'pulling off a job.' Something about Briggs attracted him, and he tried to get Briggs to lend a hand in the criminal work, promising big returns. Briggs indignantly refused, and threatened to call the police. Morrison left him, then, and went away with a snaky smile—a smile that was confident and full of cunning. Two days later, Briggs got a letter from his wife begging for money and saying that she and the girl were close to starvation."

McKenzie paused for a moment, and then resumed his story: "That night Morrison came again, and renewed his offers. Briggs resisted them, as he had done before. Then another letter arrived from the East, from Briggs' daughter this time, saying that her mother was very ill and that there was nothing with which to pay the doctor or to buy food. Morrison presented himself once more, for he seemed to have a devilish insight into Briggs' affairs and was timely in his suggestions of crime. Briggs was near to yielding, but a sudden horror rose up in him and he spurned Morrison and his fiendish suggestions and fled from him and from temptation. Next day, in a crowd on State Street, a man's pocket was picked."

Again McKenzie paused, striving to keep calm. Then he continued: "As fate would have it, Briggs, in his tattered clothes, was in that crowd, and close to the man who had been robbed. The first thing he knew he was arrested and—most damning evidence of all—the stolen pocketbook was found in his

possession. He was arraigned, his character was impeached by plain-clothes men who had seen him with Weasel Morrison, and Briggs would not give his real name because he wanted to save his wife and child from disgrace. He was sent to the penitentiary for five years—under the name of Luther Briggs. That innocent man, Mr. Ruthven, was Arlo McKenzie."

It was a simple recital, told in a voice broken with emotion.

Ruthven was astounded. "You—were sent to prison!" he exclaimed; "and for a crime you did not commit!"

"That is the truth, Mr. Ruthven," declared McKenzie earnestly, solemnly. "I was the victim of a fiendish plot. My wife died while I was in the penitentiary, and a brother—who believed me guilty and chose to abandon me—gave a home to Lois, provided for her as for his own child, and even sent her to Vassar College. When I came out of prison, I was bitter against the world. It would have been easy for me, then, to take the downward path, but Lois"—his voice was almost reverent—"became my mainstay. I came to Burt City, assumed my right name, and went to work at my trade. Later, Lois came on and joined me. Fortune has been kind. I have prospered in business and been honored politically, and the name of Arlo McKenzie is one with integrity and honor. But after this evening I shall be branded as an ex-convict, and black disgrace will cover me and mine."

His strong hands clenched spasmodically on the chair arm, although a fire of defiance burned in his eyes.

"This will not be!" breathed Lois quiveringly. "You will not be made to suffer for a wrong you never committed! Father, you have borne enough—you will not be asked to bear more!"

"I shall face what I must, and hope for the best."

"And is that all Morrison has against you?" asked Ruthven. "Just because

you refused to help him in his criminal work, has he——"

"Just a moment, please!" McKenzie interrupted. "A little more than a week ago I received a box of oranges from some unknown shipper. Inside the box was a package and a letter. The package contained tools. This is the letter. I want you to read it." He passed the white sheet to Ruthven, and the latter read:

You've turned straight, I hear, and so has wily Nate, the flimflammer. Now I can use you, and if you breathe a whisper against me I can pull down your honors and emoluments like a house of cards about your ears. I want to send the inclosed tools to Dry Wash; and I dare not keep them in my possession, as an officer is after me. To be caught with them will spell disaster. And I guess you won't care to have them around, either. Nate Wiley is freighter for Thomas Barton, the cattle baron, at Dry Wash. He travels between the ranch and town. Wiley is no friend of mine, and would do nothing for me, but you have done him a good turn, and he would do anything for you. Send these tools on to him a week from Tuesday or Wednesday, by express, and tell him to keep them under cover until they are called for. Warn him that if he doesn't do this, I will smoke him out, and you, too. I don't care how you arrange the matter, just so it covers the work. I will be on Seventeen, that passes through Burt City at eleven a. m. one week from Wednesday. Be at the station to get word to me as to what you have done. Fail in this, and all Burt City shall know you for what you are. W. M.

Here was a fiendish threat, a double-edged sword suspended by a thread over McKenzie by the machinations of Morrison. It was like the scheming scoundrel, as Ruthven knew him.

"What did you do?" asked Ruthven, in a low voice.

"I was frantic," answered McKenzie. "What could I do? Morrison had found me out, and not only myself but poor Nate Wiley as well. Wiley and I were prison mates. When Wiley got out, after doing his time, he wrote to me, declaring that he was 'going straight' and wanted an honest job. I got it for

him from Thomas Barton. Do you, can you, understand the position I was in?" asked McKenzie passionately.

"It almost killed me," he continued. "But I had on hand a kit of burglar tools, the mere possession of which was a crime. I counseled with Lois. We must get rid of them. How? All we could think of that would in any way spare Wiley and myself was by sending them along to Dry Wash. Later we could warn the law officers and have them guard against Morrison's prospective criminal operations. It was a heavy burden for us to bear, but we took the only course that promised possible safety for myself and Wylie. I was afraid to send the tools to Wylie direct; and, while I was cudgeling my wits for some way to get the tools to Dry Wash, along came those boots for Barton. I saw a way out, albeit a desperate way.

"I packed those boots myself. In another package, identically like the one containing the boots, I put the burglar tools. Then I took the boots to the office, prepaid the charges, and took a receipt. I asked the driver, Reeves, what the method was for handling outgoing packages. He showed me the whole of it, and I left him, having taken a blank waybill and a blank prepaid slip, and both were stamped by me in the express office like the ones on the original package. In filling in the waybill, I imitated Reeves' writing. Also I stuck the slips to the package of tools identically as Reeves had pasted them on the original package. The idea was to substitute the package of tools for the package containing the boots. The original package was left with Reeves after he had come from the westbound train, and I knew the package would not be sent out until the following day. That would give me time for the substitution, ample time; and only adroitness would be needed to put one package in place of the other."

"But what was the idea?" queried Ruthven, a bit puzzled.

"The idea was to let Morrison carry the package containing the boots, meet Wiley on his way from Dry Wash to the ranch, and exchange one package for the other. If Morrison were caught by the detective with a parcel containing a pair of boots, it would be infinitely better for him than being caught with the burglar kit. As for Wiley, since the package was addressed to Barton—whose integrity could not be questioned—if *he* was taken with the package of tools, he had a chance to escape suspicion. I wrote Wiley, telling him, in a covert way, what was expected of him. No one could read that letter and get anything against Wiley, Morrison, or me, I am sure."

Ruthven's mind was now plunged into the mysteries of weight, in the matter of the Barton package, and the adroitness of the substitutions. Temporarily he lost sight of the bearing of all this on the fortunes of McKenzie, and drove straight at the mystery.

"About half past three Tuesday afternoon," said Ruthven, "Summerfield weighed the Barton package. At eleven, according to Reeves, it had weighed six pounds. At three-thirty, according to Summerfield, it weighed eight pounds. How were the packages exchanged?"

"I did that," spoke up Lois wearily. "At three o'clock I called at the express office and walked behind the counter. Joe did not see me for a few minutes, as he was busy at his desk. I had a satchel which I was taking to father at the store. Inside the satchel was the package of—of burglar tools. I took out the eight-pound package and left it in place of the six-pound package, which I put in the satchel, and—and then I——"

She dropped her face suddenly in her hands, stifling a sob. Her father gazed at her with sadness not unmixed with pride.

"My girl did that for me," he explained softly. "You can understand her feelings, I think, when duty to her father ran so contrary to her own character and—and ideas of loyalty to Summerfield. But we were planning only temporary deception; after the tools were out of our hands and in Morrison's again, we had already made our preparations to turn on the scheming crook. Lois," he admonished, "if you would not break my heart, be brave."

She flung up her head, tears sparkling on her cheeks. "I will, father," she answered. "Go on."

"In my haste to get rid of the burglar kit," proceeded McKenzie, "I had left out a jimmy, a special contrivance of Morrison's. It was necessary to get it into the counterfeit package. How was I to do that? I knew the location of the express storeroom, and I also knew that outgoing packages were usually put there when kept overnight. About four in the afternoon, with the original package under my coat, I skulked down the alley and came up to the rear of the express office. I could look through the window and see the package containing the kit of tools—it lay on a shelf within easy reach. The window was open. It was barred with cross rods, but I slipped one package through between the bars and removed the other in the same way."

"That," commented Ruthven excitedly, "left the six-pound package in the storeroom, and you had the eight-pound package once more in your possession. That is how the package was at the original weight when Reeves returned, and, at Summerfield's instigation, placed it on the scales. But that night," he added, "I called at the office to meet Miss McKenzie, and when the package was weighed by all three of us, it weighed nine pounds."

"The jimmy I had added accounts for the further increase in weight."

"How was *that* substitution made?"

"After I had placed in the package the instrument I had left out, in my hurry, I went back to the rear of the express office. I was alarmed and disappointed when I saw that the original package was not in the storeroom, and it was impossible to make the substitution there and then. I was at my wits' end—but again Lois helped me out."

"I remember," murmured Ruthven. "Summerfield had left the package out in the front office to investigate it further after he had finished his evening's work."

"Mr. Summerfield left me alone in the office when he went for ice cream," explained Lois, her eyes lowered, "and I handed the six-pound package out to father, who was on the sidewalk in front, and took from him the nine-pound parcel, placing it just where Joe had left the other.

"Oh, it was hard, hard!" she said chokingly; "I was there with you and Joe when the package was weighed and found to have increased to nine pounds, and I saw you place the penciled cross on it for purposes of identification. You both trusted me, and—and I was not worthy of that trust. But," she finished resolutely, "it was all for father—and his cause was a righteous one. I had to play the part I did."

"Lois told me later of the identification mark," proceeded McKenzie, "and I placed it on the original package. I was alarmed, of course, to learn that the Barton shipment was causing so much discussion in the office. If I could, I would have given up the whole thing then and there, and have substituted the original six-pound parcel for the last time and thrown the burglar's kit into a cistern, or got rid of it in some other way. But I dared not. I had gone too far, you understand, and there was a lingering hope that I might save Wylie and myself from the vengeance of Morrison."

"It was necessary to go on," he said

despairingly, "absolutely necessary. Truly, we weave a tangled web when we start to deceive. And I was not yet through with my tinkering with the Barton shipment. About ten o'clock I received a telegram—this," and he handed the yellow slip to Ruthven. The latter read:

Inclose full canister with goods. M.

"What does that mean?" he asked.

"For 'canister' read 'revolver,'" said McKenzie. "The term is used occasionally by crooks. In this instance, of course, Morrison used it to disguise the other word. He was sending the message to a storekeeper; hence, to others not informed, it must have seemed innocent enough. This request made it necessary for me to make another substitution. As I intended turning on Morrison later, by following all his instructions to the letter I hoped to escape some of the blame he would throw on me if matters went wrong for him. Also, I saw a chance to diminish his powers for evil.

"The revolver I secured by a night visit to the store. I filled the canister, but with blank cartridges. By way of the alley I went to the rear of the express office at dead of night, slipped back the old-fashioned sash lock that secured the window, and took out the overweight package and placed the six-pound parcel in its place. I went home to unwrap the kit of tools and pack the revolver with them; and when I wanted to return and exchange the two packages, a night watchman was roaming through the alley, and I was prevented. I gave up the attempt for the night.

"Next morning Lois took the early train for Williamsburg, and rode back from there on Seventeen. She insisted on going, and her plan was to meet Morrison and explain the situation, so that he would know just what had been going on, and what was expected of him. I described Morrison to her so

that she would recognize him, and she had little difficulty in doing so. I was to be at the train, ostensibly to meet Lois, and I was to have a satchel containing the original package which I was to give to Morrison.

"I was at the station when Reeves drove up and unloaded the express matter for Seventeen. I had a chance—a desperate one—to make the substitution, and place the package with the revolver on the station platform and get the other one into the satchel. I was all unstrung, and it is a wonder I was not detected. Lois, when she got off the train, threw herself into my arms. 'I have explained everything to him, father,' she whispered; 'now give him the satchel and the Barton package, and let us be thankful we are at last rid of those terrible burglar's tools.' My relief in getting rid of that kit was as great as was Lois'. All that remained after that was to send the letter to Jenkins, the deputy sheriff at Dry Wash. I put it into the mail car on Seventeen.

"While I was at the station, waiting for the train to come, Reeves had weighed the package, and found that it now tipped the scales at ten pounds. I heard him excitedly telling Summerfield about it over the phone. From the station, I went directly home with Lois, for I was badly shaken and needed her comfort and counsel. All we could do, after that, was to wait; yes, and worry. Now you come and tell me that Morrison has been captured, and that he is to be here this afternoon and lay bare my prison record."

McKenzie got up. "That means," he went on huskily, "that all my years of work here in this new country have been thrown away. My friends and neighbors will know I am an ex-convict, and that Lois is the daughter of a man who has 'done time.'" He swayed, and his gaunt face was convulsed with sorrow and pain.

"To-night," he whispered, "I shall be ruined and disgraced—ruined and disgraced! The petty conjuring I did with that express package was wasted effort. It would have been better had I taken the burglar's kit to the Burt City sheriff, told him all just as I have told it now to you, Mr. Ruthven, and thus had the story come from my own lips. Now Morrison will tell it, and—and who knows whether——"

His voice failed. Lois ran to his side, put an arm about him, and gently but firmly led him back toward the other room. Ruthven had also risen to his feet, his brain bewildered by all he had heard; but, deep in his heart, he was conscious of profound sympathy for Arlo McKenzie and his daughter.

Lois emerged alone from the rear room, and went straight to Ruthven. "You believe my father?" she asked.

"Absolutely," he answered; "and I am sorry for him—and for you."

"When—when you write Gwen, please make it easy for us," she begged.

"I shall not write Gwen anything about it," said he, "and I shall not speak to any one about it until Morrison has had his way. Then, when I do talk, it will be as a friend of Arlo McKenzie, and as a believer in him."

She caught both his hands.

"Oh," she murmured chokingly, "I felt that the man who had befriended Howard Millyar could not turn from father and me! Will you come this afternoon? Will you please be with us when Weasel Morrison faces father? I want you to know all that takes place, Mr. Ruthven."

"I will come," he said, and he went away.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLOUD'S BRIGHT LINING.

IN order to marshal the facts regarding those two Barton packages, so that the various substitutions might be clear to him, directly after dinner at

the hotel Ruthven went to his room. With pencil and paper he jotted down the following:

Tuesday, about eleven o'clock. McKenzie learns how express matter is handled, and, while sending package of boots to Barton, takes from the office a prepaid yellow slip and blank waybill. Also, without the knowledge of Reeves, he uses the rubber stamps on the waybills.

Tuesday, three o'clock. Lois enters express office with satchel. Makes first substitution while Summerfield, busy in the cage with his back toward her, is oblivious of her presence. Taking out the parcel with the burglars' tools, she puts into the satchel the six-pound package.

Tuesday, about three-thirty. Summerfield looks over the packages by the stove. Weighs Barton package, and finds it weighs eight pounds. He places it in the storeroom, laying it on shelf near open, barred window. McKenzie, finding an improved jimmy has been left out in hurry and excitement of getting substitute package ready, creeps up through alley back of express office and substitutes original six-pound package for counterfeit eight-pound parcel.

Tuesday, five p. m. Reeves, the driver, comes into express office. Package is weighed by him and Summerfield, and tips the scale at six pounds.

Tuesday, about six p. m. McKenzie comes to rear window of storeroom to put back the counterfeit package with the added jimmy, but is unable to do so. The original package is not in the storeroom, but has been left outside by Reeves and Summerfield.

Tuesday evening, eight-thirty. Lois comes to express office. Summerfield goes to drug store for ice cream. While he is away, Lois hands original package to her father, who is outside waiting, and takes from him counterfeit package with the improved jimmy added.

Tuesday evening, about nine. Package is weighed by Summerfield, Lois, and Ruthven. Nine pounds. Unknown to Summerfield, but with knowledge of Lois, Ruthven puts private pencil mark on package.

Tuesday evening, after nine. Weasel Morrison's telegram about the "canister" is received by McKenzie. That night, McKenzie opens window in rear of storeroom and removes package to add still another article to its contents. When he comes to put back the counterfeit package and take original, he is interfered with by night watchman and gives up the attempt for the night. Lois has told

him of Ruthven's private mark, and McKenzie duplicates it on the other package.

Wednesday, nine-thirty a. m. Package weighed again. Six pounds.

Wednesday, ten-thirty a. m. Reeves drives to station with outgoing freight for Seventeen. McKenzie there with a satchel, ostensibly to meet Lois. Lois had gone east at eight-thirty, that morning, to catch Seventeen at Williamsburg, and ride back with Weasel Morrison, so as to explain the situation to him. While Reeves is unloading wagon, McKenzie exchanges counterfeit parcel with added revolver, putting package containing boots into satchel. Hands this satchel to Morrison when train halts, and Lois gets off. Mails his letter on the train—the one for Jenkins, the deputy sheriff at Dry Wash.

Wednesday, ten-fifty a. m. Reeves telephones from station that package weighs ten pounds.

Note: Mighty good thing for me that the "canister" was loaded with blanks.

"That," Ruthven remarked, after he had scribbled out this summary, "gets this series of substitutions in black and white, so far as McKenzie and Lois are concerned. Now, what happened after that? Let's see."

Picking up the pencil, he reflected for a few moments, and went on with his writing:

On Seventeen. Train halts at Bluffton by order of division superintendent. Morrison learns an extra is coming after Seventeen with Durfee and Harrington and others. Gets worried about package in express car. Goes forward, mingling with other passengers who have got off the train during the wait. While messenger is busy, exchanges packages through open door of car, leaving six-pound parcel in place of the one weighing ten pounds. When extra arrives, package in express car is found to weigh six pounds, and to contain tan bluchers for Barton. Morrison sees and recognizes Ruthven from car window. Watches while Ruthven jumps on the train. Knows he is after him, and that he must get rid of burglar tools. Goes forward, enters express car, and bowls over messenger from behind. Exchanges burglar tools for six-pound package, and jumps off train just before it reaches Okaday.

Leaning back in his chair, Ruthven studied this last effort. It was one of analysis, pure and simple. In the light of what he had learned from McKenzie,

he believed he had hit off the course of events pretty accurately.

"Now," he asked himself, "what about the attempted holdup on the way to the ranch? Ah, I have it!" Again he seized the pencil and wrote:

Thursday forenoon. Nate Wylie sick with mountain fever and unable to make the trip to Dry Wash. William Martin acts as substitute freighter. Morrison's plans all up in the air. Only thing he can do is to pull off a holdup in making exchange of package with boots for package with burglar's tools. His pal helps him. Horses run away. Package spilled out with rest of freight in the mountain wagon. Morrison picks up package with tools and puts down package with boots—breaking wrapper and box to make it appear as though package had received rough treatment in spill from wagon.

"By Jove, I've got it!" exclaimed Ruthven, in a glow over his work. "I have followed those two packages, in all their changes and adventures, from the time the boots were handed over the counter of the express office in Burt City. How blamed simple it all is, when one puts it down in black and white! And yet, what a brain twister when one hasn't got the key to the mystery. I——"

He broke off his reflections as the tragic side of the matter forced itself on his attention. His heart sank as he thought of McKenzie and Lois. When Weasel Morrison talked against McKenzie, the Honorable Arlo McKenzie, member of the legislature, the junior partner in the firm of Long & McKenzie, what would happen? Ruthven, who had a big heart and was kindly and considerate to all, felt a clammy hand gripping his brain. How would Summerfield behave toward Lois, when the dread truth came out?

"I think Joe is a real man," Ruthven reflected, "and I'm sure that he'll act like a man. He won't give up the girl, no matter what Weasel Morrison says. What a scoundrel Morrison is, anyhow! McKenzie is caught in a web similar to the one that entangled Mill-

yar. There was a silver lining to Mill-yar's cloud, but McKenzie's troubles so far as I can see, have no bright side."

Toward six o'clock, Ruthven made his way back to the McKenzie home. McKenzie himself met him at the door. He was dressed with care, freshly shaved, and wearing his best clothes. There was grim determination in his gaunt face. Just from the look of him, Ruthven knew that he had steeled himself to see that crisis through to a finish.

Lois was in the sitting room, quietly waiting. "This awful hour finds us ready, Mr. Ruthven," she said, with a wan smile. Then she whispered, as her father stepped out of the room for a moment: "Watch dad, will you? He seems so calm and self-possessed that I am afraid some desperate purpose is in his mind. He—he might attack Morrison."

Ruthven nodded reassuringly. "I'll watch," he added. "Don't worry."

They heard the train roll up to the station from the west. It was several minutes late. McKenzie placed himself at a window from which he could see the railroad station, and watched the arriving passengers. Ruthven got up and stepped to his side. Out of the crowd that moved around the station, one man could be seen making in the direction of Al Reeves, who was hauling a truckload of incoming freight. The two talked together for a moment, then Reeves turned and pointed in the direction of McKenzie's house.

"That's Hackett, the detective," said Ruthven.

The ticking of the clock sounded like a knell. The fitful piping of the canary only served to accentuate the dreariness of the wait.

"He's coming this way alone," remarked McKenzie colorlessly. "Is some one else bringing Morrison?"

"Maybe Morrison isn't going to come at all," returned Ruthven, a sudden

hope thrilling in his voice. "I told Hackett I didn't see the use of bothering you with any of Morrison's schemes. He insisted that it was necessary; but maybe he has changed his mind."

"I believe, Mr. Ruthven," said McKenzie, "that you have been a much better friend of mine, all along, than I had any reason to think; but the blow is going to fall, and we may as well wait patiently for it."

He sat down and cast a glance, full of vague anxiety, toward Lois. She smiled back at him sympathetically and cheerfully. Presently there was a knock at the door, and Lois went to answer it.

"Mr. McKenzie's house?" came the question in Hackett's voice from the front door.

"Yes."

"Is Mr. McKenzie here, or will I have to go to the store to see him?"

"He is here. Please come in."

The detective was ushered into the room. "Hello, Ruthven!" he called; "glad to see you here. This is Mr. McKenzie?"

Ruthven introduced the two men.

"You've called to see me about—about something Weasel Morrison said?" queried McKenzie, bracing himself.

"That's it exactly."

"I thought Morrison was to be with you?"

"So did I. Jenkins and I were bringing him and his pal along, and I intended to stop off at Burt City with Morrison, but—well, that is impossible now. You see, I had Morrison handcuffed to my right wrist, and in some way he managed to break the cuff, dashed down the aisle of the car, and jumped into the right of way."

Here was startling information. All those in the room sat up very straight as they listened.

"And he escaped?" asked Ruthven.

"No," said the detective slowly, "he didn't escape. The train was going rapidly—we were midway between stations—and there was a deep, rocky cut beside the track. Morrison went into that cut like a bag of meal, and rolled over and over. When the train stopped and backed up, we carried him aboard and brought him to the railroad company's hospital at Okaday. Jenkins got off with him there, taking the other prisoner along. I came on here."

"Was—was Morrison badly hurt?" asked McKenzie.

"There was a doctor on the train, and he examined Morrison, and didn't think he had a chance. Morrison revived so that he could talk, and was made to realize his situation. He dictated a statement which he wanted brought to Mr. McKenzie. I haven't the slightest idea what it means to you, McKenzie, but here it is. Morrison could not use his hand to write, but he placed his finger on a pencil and some one else wrote his name for him. His statement was witnessed by myself, Jenkins, the doctor, and a nurse."

Hackett passed a folded paper to McKenzie. The latter unfolded it, and, in a shaking voice, read aloud:

Some years ago, in Chicago, one Luther Briggs was arrested as a pickpocket and sent to the penitentiary for five years. He served his time, left prison, and made good in the

West. Desiring to undo a wrong, and being told that I am near the end of my mortal career, I wish to state that I was guilty of the crime for which Luther Briggs was convicted. The leather was lifted by me and transferred to the pocket of Briggs. I thought Briggs would make an excellent side partner, and had approached him on the matter, but he would not listen to me. Inasmuch as this supposed offense was his first, I thought he would escape with a light sentence, and that I could handle him when he came out of prison. But the judge gave him the limit, and my plan went wrong. This is the truth.

(Signed)

WEASEL MORRISON.

A dead silence reigned in the room when McKenzie finished reading. With a long, deep sigh he fell back in his chair and the paper dropped from his fingers.

"Father!" burst joyously from Lois, and she ran to put her arms about him.

"At last, after all these years!" murmured McKenzie brokenly.

Ruthven took the detective by the arm, and drew him from the room and from the house. "We're only in the way there now," he cried happily. "Say, I'd like to give three good cheers and a tiger! Oh, this is fine, and all the finer because it was unexpected."

"Hanged if I know what I've done that's so all-fired fine, but sometimes it's just as well for a detective not to know too much. When can I get a train back to Okaday?"

THE CALL OF THE OPEN

By Dorothea Mackellar

I AM sick of the noise in the long gray street where the crowd floods up and down,

And I long for the touch of untainted winds in the little-trodden lands.
I am tired of the frigid, unchanging rules and the thousand eyes of town.

I would go to a place where the men are men and hold their lives in their hands.

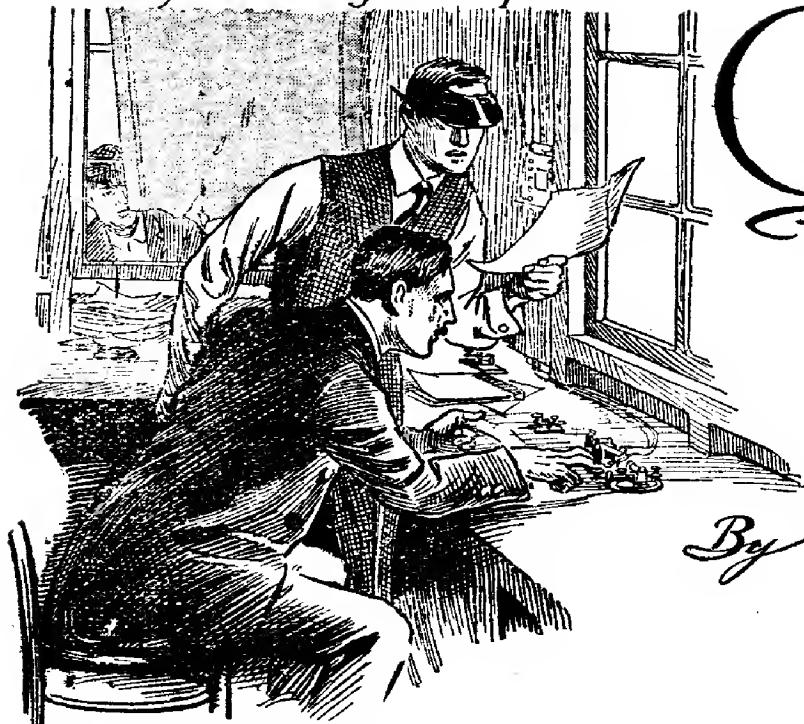
I would go to the life which is quite alive, the world that is all around;

I must break myself free of this mincing dance where one may not step aside

Out of fear of the million fools that yelp from their kennels custom bound—

To the naked noon and the throbbing night and the life where the world is wide!

Tale of a Press Agent's Exploit



On the Wire

By Edgar White

SOON after the town called Break o' Day organized its commercial club a committee was appointed to visit Tom Blakely, publisher of the *Weekly Sunrise*, and explain what the club expected of him in the great uplift movement just inaugurated. Tom was seated at a long table in his dinky office, reading exchanges and charging the atmosphere with tobacco smoke from a corncob pipe. He was a big, good-natured chap, not long off the farm, but with a wild yearning to be an editor and print pieces that would "make 'em sit up." At the district school where Tom secured all the "book learnin" he had, he was editor in chief of the *Owl Creek News*, printed on a hand-me-down typewriter, and his success with that provincial sheet had put the editorial bug in his head.

"We are looking to you, Tom," said Colonel Jim Riley, lawyer, real-estate man, and notary public, who was chairman of the committee, "to give us the publicity. We want Break o' Day on the map."

"Sure!" acquiesced the lank editor as he knocked the ashes out of his inspirational assistant and tossed it on the table. "I'll fill the paper up every week—editorial and local boosts till you can't rest."

The chairman gave a contemptuous grunt. "The *Sunrise* is all right here at home, Tom," he remarked, "but we are after bigger game. We want to interest outside capital. The purpose is to let everybody in these United States know there's a thriving town in these parts by the name of Break o' Day."

The young editor stared. "How you going to put 'em next—telephone 'em?" he inquired.

"You're to get appointed as special correspondent for a tiptop metropolitan daily paper," said Riley, "and send in stuff every so often under a Break o' Day date line. See?"

"Oh!" That was something new to Editor Blakely. More, it was intensely fascinating. Why not? Couldn't he write as well as the next man? And why wouldn't it go in a great big paper

as well as at home so long as it was good reading? Then came a doubt.

"Reckon they'll print a lot of stuff about boosting the town?" he asked. "Won't they call it advertising and turn it down?"

"We don't care what sort of stuff you send so long as it has the Break o' Day date line hitched to it somewhere," responded Mr. Riley. "It's to get the town known—that's what we're after. Write anything you want. So's you get the line cast we'll tend to bringing in the fish."

Within a week Tom Blakely was the duly accredited special correspondent for *The Daily Continental*, with authority to cover all the news that there might be in the region of Break o' Day. Then there was a circular of instructions, which the correspondent faithfully memorized. The work was entirely to his liking. Aside from helping the town, it might help Tom Blakely, who was born with a craze for writing.

Tom didn't proclaim from the rooftops that he was now connected authoritatively with the daily press, but he felt a burning desire to make that announcement. His brief experience as a country editor had taught him that it was wiser to crow after results than before. He would get up a nice story about something or other, and when the paper came out with it under a Break o' Day date line the people would know without his telling who the author was. By good fortune he had in mind a local incident worth narrating. The instructions contained a rule for this:

Stories not strictly news may be sent by mail, and will be paid for at regular space rates.

The subject was in that classification. Refilling and lighting his working partner, the young editor turned to his table and went to work on his story. While some shiny-headed literary ex-

pert might have found enough grammatical blowholes everlasting to condemn it, he would have had to confess that the incident was good and the narration interesting. The paper printed it, and Break o' Day opened its eyes. Colonel Riley called around and tendered a cigar and a clap on the shoulder.

"I knew you could do it!" he said.

II.

UNDER the encouragement of his first story, the correspondent went to work on others. It seemed easy to find subjects, and his fingers tingled with the enthusiasm of heart and brain. The results were eminently satisfactory to the writer, and strong hope followed the long envelopes marked "Special Correspondence—Rush."

Two days later Tom, with eager hands, picked up the paper that should have contained his story, but it wasn't there. Then hope suggested it was being held for the Sunday edition. But the day of rest brought another disappointment. Later his matter was returned with thanks. He made several more ventures, and then the editor kindly suggested that heavy spring advertising was responsible for lack of space for material that was "not overly important."

"Not overly important!"

The phrase rankled in his breast for a week. Then he picked up his instructions, and noted that telegraph matter was given particular attention.

"That's it," thought Tom. "They want live news right off the wire. I've been a chump."

That week the mayor's daughter was married to the hotel man of Break o' Day. It was a bang-up affair. There was an orchestra from the big city, flowers, and presents galore. The parlors of the hotel were decorated with a sinful disregard of expense. There

were a dozen bridesmaids, and a world of white-gloved ushers. In the center of the main hall was a vine arrangement for the ceremony. Wedding bells and orange blossoms blazed everywhere. There was no doubt that it was the swellest affair ever pulled off at Break o' Day. In his journalistic capacity Tom witnessed the whole performance. It was not far from midnight when the correspondent, who had waited conscientiously until every detail of the wedding should unfold before his own eyes, rushed to his office to begin work on his big story. Before he picked up his pencil he reread the instructions to be sure of his ground.

Should you have a story of high importance at an hour too late to query, send it in. Remember, under the law of *The Daily Continental*, the highest crime is getting scooped!

It was clear as noonday. Nothing could happen at Break o' Day of higher importance than the nuptials he had just witnessed. The whole town had been talking about it for a week, and everybody would look for a big spread in the papers. The hired musicians from the city connected the event with that town, and made it certain *The Continental* would stand all it could get. So Tom bribed the railroad operator with a package of cigarettes, and sailed in. He didn't leave out a thing that either party to the marriage might have suggested printing. At the end he filed a complete list of the wedding presents. The story made three thousand words, and cost the paper about fifteen dollars. Tom went to bed satisfied. They'd have to print that stuff, because the telegraph company would make 'em pay for it whether they used it or not. He had taken the precaution to mail pictures of the bride and groom in advance.

The local news dealer did a land-office business in *Continents* next day —for a while. Purchasers hastily

turned the pages for the big story. But it seemed there was nothing doing.

"It ain't in!" exclaimed a disappointed girl who had been one of the bridesmaids.

"And he said there'd be a column, with pictures!" growled another disconsolate one.

"If I'd 'a' known he wasn't going to print it I wouldn't 'a' bothered about giving him all that information," commented the mayor, who had purchased ten copies of *The Continental*, "sights unseen."

"Here it is!" said some one.

"Where! Read it!" came a score of voices.

The discoverer did so:

"Break o' Day, May 5.—Charles Smith and Lizzie Jones were married here to-night at the Palace Hotel. The bride is a daughter of Timothy Jones, mayor of the town."

"Is that all?" they cried.

Yes, that was all. The papers were thrown down in disgust. Tom wasn't in a very good humor when the mayor called on him, but as the grievance was common to both of them they did not fall out. The editor promised to print the whole story in his own paper, and the mayor agreed to take fifty copies. But this didn't end the correspondent's troubles. The mail brought from St. Louis a manifold copy of his telegram, with a letter informing him that he had violated Instruction No. 136a and that his account would be charged with the telegraph toll. There was also a copy of the printed instructions with certain lines heavily underscored.

From that miserable day Tom went into his shell. His first idea had been to write a scathing reply in which he would hint at the journalistic incapacity of the city editors to tell a good story when they saw it. He knew that the mayor, the hotel keeper, and the unanimous population of Break o' Day would gladly sign as attesting witnesses. Next he thought of resigning and throwing

their insulting letter and their instructions in their teeth. But that looked a bit childish, and Tom was a man, whether he was much of a correspondent or not. Anyhow, this wasn't the end of the world, and then—"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

He had meant well, and in the eternal order of things there was bound to be a chance. So he laid aside his instructions and the disturbing letter, and waited. He hadn't been fired, and was still the duly accredited correspondent for *The Continental* at Break o' Day. Poor consolation, but some!

III.

TIME, a month later; scene, editorial rooms, *The Daily Continental*. Operator takes message hurriedly over to a thin man at a desk, who reads this:

Break o' Day, June 3.—Ten-year feud in Bull Run neighborhood culminates in annihilation of two families, serious wounding of six men; four murderers in prison—sheriff—

The man at the desk waited to read no more. He wired Blakely to get busy instanter, and send everything the operator at Break o' Day could handle. Artists were ordered to clear the decks for action to illustrate the report. Everything was cleaned out of the first page, and the scare-head man was experimenting with such full-page lines as "Two Whole Families Slaughtered!" "Streams Flow Red in Bull Run Township!" "Reign of Terror Near Break o' Day!"

In the course of an hour this terse message was laid on the anxious telegraph editor's desk:

How about that letter? T. B.

The telegraph editor frowned and carried it to the "old man," who looked thoughtful a moment, then said: "That's the fellow who sent us a three-thousand-word wire about the wedding

up his way. I don't believe he's got sense enough to handle the story he has now. Better send Mac up there; he's just got ten minutes to catch the train. Tell him to scoot!"

MacConnell was one of the stars. He happened to be in. The first telegram from Break o' Day was put in his hands, the boss came out with a roll of bills, and the telegraph editor helped him on with his overcoat. "If that yarn is anything near the situation," said the managing editor, "give the operator there a twenty-dollar bonus and make him stay with you. Don't spare expenses."

This was merely a little formality, as if the "old man" had said: "Good-by; pleasant journey."

The reporter knew what to do and just how to weigh the story. The editors breathed easier. MacConnell was a veteran, and was at home in a riot or any sort of trouble. It was calculated that he would reach Break o' Day shortly after noon. By two o'clock his stuff ought to be coming in. When that hour arrived without any word, the guiding heads in the office began to get worried. A message was sent directing MacConnell to report his arrival at Break o' Day. It brought no answer. At three a telegram came from Blakely wanting to know if *The Continental* cared about the sanguinary battle in Bull Run Township.

"What'll I say?" asked the telegraph editor.

After a moment's meditation the old man suggested a message to the station operator at Break o' Day asking if MacConnell had arrived. The operator replied that he had arrived and had made a deposit of twenty dollars to insure prompt service; the telegrapher was ready for work, but MacConnell had not turned up with his copy. Blakely, however, was sitting there in the office with the story all written out, waiting to hear from *The Continental*.

"Tell Blakely to file his stuff," growled the M. E.

"What will I tell him about that letter?" asked the telegraph editor. "He won't let it go till we fix up about that."

"What do you suppose the lunkhead wants to know?"

"Can't imagine," replied the other. "Maybe he wants you to tell him you didn't mean it."

"Well," said the big editor impatiently, "tell him we'll make it all right with him if he'll release the stuff quick. Wonder what the deuce become of MacConnell!"

Blakely was notified that all was forgiven and asked to be good and let his horror story rumble along. But the enemy had other terms.

"Will you print the Jones-Smith wedding just as it was sent in, and the pictures?" Blakely wanted to know over the wire.

The telegraph editor could feel his hair getting gray around the temples.

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the old man when the latest condition reached him. "Do you suppose MacConnell is dead?"

IV.

THE minutes were sailing away like mad. Artists, copy readers, and others who were to work on the big story stood idly around. The young women hurriedly donned their hats and things so as to escape the direful language. It was too late to send another man. There was no other correspondent within forty miles of Break o' Day. But to print that fool wedding story long after it had ceased to be news would make the paper the subject for jest in all the years to come. Blakely must be crazy. A man of such erratic notions couldn't possibly have sense enough to get a big story right.

The old man had almost decided to let the whole business go to the dogs

when he heard a newsboy yelling something or other about Bull Run. The evening paper was secured, and the two editors eagerly devoured it. There were tremendous headlines, but not much of a story. The real news extended no further than what was contained in Blakely's first message to *The Continental*; but around that had been built an ingenious structure of surmises. With a sigh of relief the editor dropped it, and told the telegraph man to come to immediate terms with the correspondent at Break o' Day.

Then the story came red-hot. It covered every detail of the tragedy, arranged in chronological order, all told in a calm, dispassionate way, and concluding with a history of the feud district from ten years back to date.

When the last page had been read and approved with hardly a change, the telegraph editor walked in on the chief. "Blakely delivered the goods," he said.

"Confound him!" was the ungrateful rejoinder.

"It's the best-written story we've printed in twelve months," pursued the telegraph editor.

"What?" exploded the other.

"He's a diamond in the rough. We'll have to cultivate him," was the telegraph editor's advice.

Half an hour later there came another call from Break o' Day. To the intense surprise of the editors it was from MacConnell, the lost "star." MacConnell wired:

Gang of riders from Bull Run here when I arrived. Spotted me soon after I left correspondent at depot. Said would not let anything get out about that shooting till they got the fellows they were after. Took me out of town and held me in old cabin till just a little while ago. When I got loose rushed to telegraph office and learned our man Blakely had sent good story. As he was leaving Bull Run crowd saw him. Learned he sent the message, and were mad as tigers. Blakely held them off with gun till they winged him. Citizens heard firing and mixed in with shotguns. Two of

gang killed, two wounded and captured, one got away. Blakely now at mayor's house, cared for like king. He is trump. His gun was empty when he went down. MAC.

What the reporter did not mention—for probably he did not realize its importance—was the country editor's cryptic utterance when they helped him into the hack.

"Say," gasped Blakely, "will this put us on the map?"

A Soft Answer

A SMALL boy came home one day in a rather disheveled state.

"Tommy," exclaimed his mother, "you've been fighting again!"

"Well," said Tommy, in self-defense, "the boy next door was fresh."

"That was no reason for fighting. You should have remembered that a soft answer turneth away wrath, and you should have given him a soft answer."

"I did," said Tommy. "That's what started the fight. I threw a ripe tomato at him."

A Wishbone Proposal

THHEY were dining in a restaurant, and he ordered as part of the meal a roast chicken. When the waiter carved it up the young man asked for the wishbone, and after the waiter had left them they settled down to the business of breaking it.

"You see," the young man explained, showing her the wishbone, "you take hold here and I hold the other end. Then we must each make a wish and pull, and when it breaks the one who gets the bigger part of it will have his or her wish gratified."

The lady said she quite understood. "But I don't know what to wish for," she protested shyly.

"Oh, you can think of something," he urged.

"I can't think of anything," she replied.

"Well, I'll wish for you," he suggested.

The young lady blushed. "Will you really?" she asked.

"Yes," he said firmly, "I will."

"Well, then," she said, smiling happily, "there's no use fooling about with the old wishbone. If you wish for me, you—you can have me!"

Hard to Satisfy

A RICH money lender lost his pocketbook at one of the Paris railway stations, just as he was on the point of starting on most important and pressing business. It contained about one thousand pounds in notes and gold.

On his return some six weeks afterward, he learned that the pocketbook had been found, and was deposited at the lost-property office.

He went there, and the pocketbook was handed to him. With a trembling hand, and his heart beating with joy, he opened it and carefully examined the contents.

"Pardon me," he said, when he had finished counting, "there's something missing."

"I believe not," replied the official. "What is it?"

"What is it? Why, where's the interest?"

Easily Answered

A TOURIST was being shown round the village churchyard in England by the aged sexton. The old man was telling him all sorts of fairy stories about the famous people who had been connected with the church.

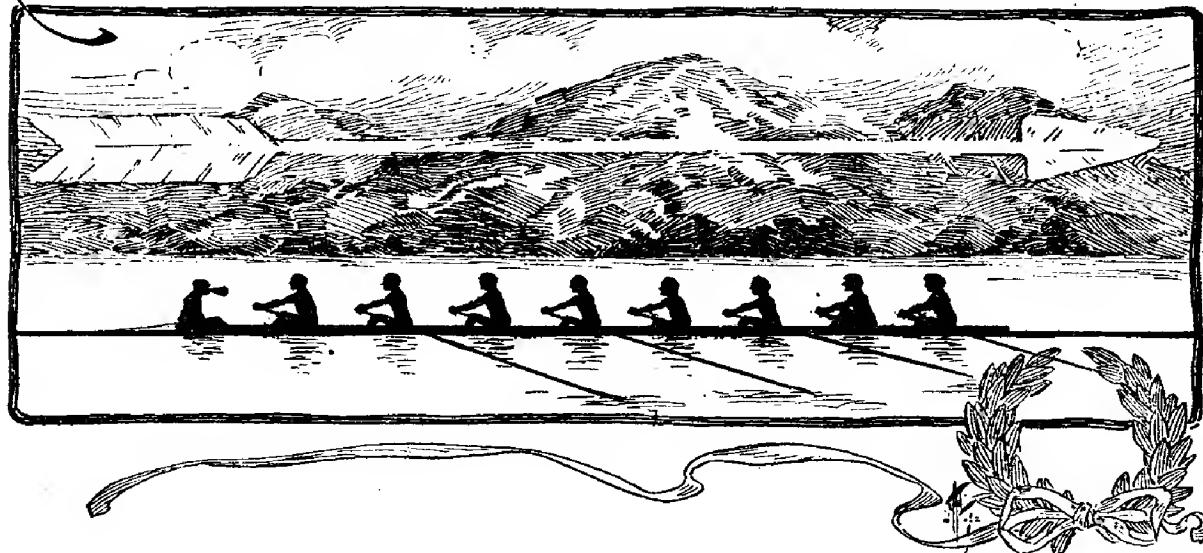
"Ah, yes, sir!" he said. "This is a famous cemetery. Here lies Oliver Cromwell; over there we have the remains of Julius Cæsar. And here"—he hesitated, his finger pointing to a third grave—"I—I forget who is lying here."

"I could tell you who is lying here!" commented the visitor, staring at him sternly.

As the Arrow to the Bow

A Tale of Intercollegiate Rowing Races.

By
James French
Dorrance



PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Briefly related for the benefit of new readers.

ROBERT SUMNER, a student in the University of Washington, has rescued a girl named Charlotte Crawford from a steamer accident on Puget Sound. News of this rescue and of Sumner's skill as an oarsman in managing a lifeboat spreads among the students, and Harrington, the crew manager, tells Sumner that the head coach, Liddell, wants him to try for the varsity eight. After an interview with Liddell, Sumner consents, as the university is preparing to send a crew to the intercollegiate races at Poughkeepsie.

When Sumner declines an invitation from Charlotte to attend a supper at her sorority house, the girl determines to investigate the reason of the mystery which always surrounds him. Taking a canoe, she paddles alongshore to a cabin on a point near Cape Flattery, where Sumner and his mother live. Mrs. Sumner avoids meeting Charlotte, but Sumner welcomes her politely. While they are talking, Burton Tandy, an admirer of Charlotte, comes along in another canoe. Jealousy of Charlotte's friendship with Sumner makes Tandy threaten to reveal the secret of Sumner's life, but for some reason he keeps silence.

Bland, an attorney in charge of the Tandy estate, writes a letter to Sumner ask-

ing for an option on coal lands owned by Sumner. By mistake this letter is posted before Tandy is ready to have it sent.

CHAPTER VI.

HOPE DEFERRED.



ALTHOUGH Robert Sumner had never before heard of R. Choate Bland, his letter held the young man's serious attention, as did anything bearing upon the Flattery coal vein, in which his hope for the future was so strongly centered. Part of the attorney's letter was as follows:

Clients of mine are willing to consider an option for the purchase of the Dusk group. It is possible that we can arrive at terms which will be to our mutual satisfaction and advantage. At any rate, it will do no harm to talk things over. Kindly come in to see me at your earliest convenience.

The stationery on which this was typed impressed Sumner favorably. Glancing at the engraved letterhead, he noted that Bland's Seattle office was in the Henry Building, an exclusive

modern structure, favored by rich corporations and their representatives. As the missive set forth, it would do no harm to talk over the coal proposition. If further transactions seemed likely, there would be time for him to investigate Bland's reliability and to safeguard himself.

When he was shaved and brushed and generally groomed in the best his limited wardrobe afforded, the young man strode off to the electric-car line that led cityward, with the air of one who sets out to conquer. The car was comparatively empty, and he had a cross seat to himself, so he again studied the missive on which his new hope was founded.

As they were leaving the university station, he realized that some one had stopped in the aisle opposite his seat, and he looked up, to find Charlotte Crawford beaming upon him. His plan of self-effacement, at least until she had passed judgment on the promised Tandy disclosure, was untenable, for there was no doubting her desire to sit and chat with him on the half-hour run into the heart of Seattle. Arising, he offered her the seat by the window.

"So I'm not the only studious soul who occasionally answers the call of the city," she said, taking the proffered seat and making room for him beside her.

"I'm answering a sordid business call," he said, with a laugh which she remembered she had never heard on the campus, but which had attracted her when they were together in the lifeboat. Hope was ascendant, and he borrowed confidence from the missive in his pocket, indefinite as it was. "Between my flower ranch, rowing, and the eighteen hours of college work, I'm dragging this year," he added, "there isn't much time left for pleasures, metropolitan or rural."

"But you enjoy your work with the flowers," she reminded him.

"So much that I can't claim any great credit as a working student." He laughed again, this time for the secret hope that a coal-land option would bring him out of the work-way class. "I wonder if you will permit me to send you a box of my hothouse roses for the hop next Friday? They will be only buds, but appropriate, and none of the women will have finer."

Sumner was just a bit amazed at the temerity of this offer. He had felt compelled to make it by his desire to do some little thing for the one "coed" who had ever evidenced the slightest interest in him, and by the thought that this might be his last opportunity.

"It is surprising how rapidly some people emerge from their chrysalis, once they start," she thought, beaming upon him with frank approval. "I shall be delighted with the flowers," she responded, "particularly because you forced them to bloom ahead of time. Do you dance, Mr. Sumner?"

Thanks to his weathered complexion, the flush that mounted to his cheeks at this very casual question was not apparent. Her question brought to him an acute realization of his social limitations, and he was ashamed to tell her that the only steps he knew were those which the Straits natives danced at their *potlatches* or "give-away" feasts.

"You forget, Miss Crawford, that I come from the very last frontier," he said. "We don't dance your sort of dances in civilization's jumping-off place."

But this evasion served only to heighten her interest. She chatted to him of the prevailing craze for new and weird dance steps, of how enthusiastically people had taken up the fox trot and the lame-duck waltz. She was certain that an Indian dance from their own west coast would be a sensation.

"Will you not teach me the steps?" she asked.

This unexpected interest astonished

him. "Can you imagine a city orchestra reproducing the native music?" he said dubiously; but she expressed the belief that Indian music had been harmonized for both piano and orchestra, and added a note to her shopping list.

"I'll stop in at a music store to-day and inquire," she said. "If I can find the music, you may consider yourself elected to teach me the steps. We'll give the U something to arise and take notice of, won't we?"

After this unintended plunge into social hot water, Sumner grew cautious and forced the burden of the conversation upon the girl, though he doubted that she noticed his intent. She found a dozen things to talk about, and discussed them all with a rapidity of thought and fertility of expression that increased his admiration. He was sorry when the car swept into the regrade district and reached the corner nearest the Henry Building at Fourth Avenue and Union Street.

As he made his way into the building, his thoughts were not upon the coal-land option which he had come to investigate. What a wonderful creature was she he had just left! Her beauty with its delicate coloring, her charm of manner, her sprightly conversation all claimed his devotion. "Confound Burton Tandy, anyway!" he said to himself. "Why hasn't fate been willing to keep my secret? I'm certain I would know where to draw the line, and a year or two of friendship with Charlotte Crawford would not harm her and would help me mightily."

In something of a daze, a prey to conflicting emotions, he was elevated to the floor which held the office he sought. Only the sight of the gilt-lettered inscriptions upon the office door brought him back to grim reality.

There was nothing startling about its announcement—"R. Choate Bland, Attorney at Law"—for he had expected that. But at the bottom of the ground

glass was this surprising addendum: "Office of the R. B. Tandy Estate." Sumner started back at this unexpected combination of his hopes and fears upon the same door glass.

Into his mind flashed the shrewd suspicion that in this same combination might be found the reason for Burton Tandy's unexplained silence. It was evident that Attorney Bland and the estate which represented his enemy's fortune were closely connected. Suppose the estate was the client of which the lawyer spoke in his letter? If the Tandy interests desired his coal land, the heir to them might well be willing to take back his animosity until a deal was assured by the taking of options.

For a moment Robert thought of turning away without entering the office and ignoring the invitation to a conference. Second thought, however, reminded him that this would not affect the personal issue. After all, what did it matter to him who bought his coal, so long as he got his price? Glad that he had seen the sign of combination, which would serve to put him on guard, he stepped into a plainly furnished office, the front quarter of which was separated from the rest by a railing.

A man, occupied at a filing cabinet which ran along one wall, looked up and jerked his head toward a bench, as much as to say: "Sit down and wait until I've found what I'm searching for." From the bench, Sumner noticed an open door, through which he could look into what was evidently Bland's private office, the floor of which wore a velvety green rug. The heavy furniture was of rosewood, the general effect too ornate.

Presently the little man slammed a tin case back into the rack with nervous haste, and approached the rail. "Well?" he queried impatiently. "What is it? What is it?"

"I should like to see Mr. Bland."

"Where's that boy? Who's run off

with that flighty stenographer? They're never around when one wants them." The nervous individual directed these remarks to the empty chairs within the rail. Then he returned to his visitor. "You'd like to see Bland, eh? Well, you're looking at him. What is it?"

"I am Robert Sumner," said the junior, and there he stopped on the reasonable expectation that further explanation would be superfluous.

It seemed to him that the lawyer started. There was no doubting the sharp look that he sent over the railing, the narrowing of thinly lashed lids, or the compression of the corners of his mouth. With a letter requesting an interview in his pocket, Sumner naturally wondered at these indications of surprise.

For once Bland's facial control slightly failed him. The appearance of the student, on the heels of what Burton Tandy had told him at the university the previous day, seemed uncanny. A sudden fear clutched him at the thought that Sumner already might be moved to retaliation. But in a moment he was himself again, cool, calculating, ready to fence to the last thrust and to take advantage of any opening.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Sumner?"

In turn the young man was surprised. "I had a letter from you yesterday, asking me to call," he replied. "No particular time was set, but I happened to be coming into town to-day, and here I am."

Bland was puzzled only a moment. He recalled having tossed the letter to Tandy, and that the latter had thrown it down on his desk. Some one, he decided, must have mailed it.

"I recall now," said the lawyer, holding open the gate. "Won't you come in?" He led the way into the private office and indicated a chair facing his desk. "Will you excuse me a moment until I get off an important telegram?"

Sumner was glad of the delay when his eyes fell upon a map which was pinned upon the wall behind the lawyer. He recognized the familiar lines of the region inside the cape where lay the coal locations on which he set such store. There was a considerable area blocked off in blue pencil on which he made out "Tandy Estate" lettered in white. Running out from this were several red blotches marked "Option." A white strip in the center of these was unmarked, but he readily recognized that this followed the general lines of his own coal location—the Dusk vein.

What particularly interested him, however, was a profile sketch which had been inserted on the water portion of the enlarged map. This comprised a series of bunkerlike docks, obviously coal pockets. His heart began a terrific hammering of elation with the conviction that they extended from his own property into a small natural harbor, which was the only available shipping point for miles along the precipitous shore of the Straits of Fuca.

That this momentary inspection of the map was worth many thousands to him came to mind at once. Until that moment he had not realized the value of his almost exclusive frontage on the only safe harbor in the district. According to the coloring, the Tandy Estate owned three acres to his one, and had options on as many more. But he held the key to the situation, and they would have to pay before he would unlock the door. Particularly would they have to pay since the estate that would soon come to his enemy was so vitally concerned.

As Bland threw down his pen, indicating that the telegram was finally worded to his satisfaction, Sumner discreetly withdrew his gaze. The lawyer stepped into the outer office and summoned a district messenger. When he returned, the student's gaze was innocently directed out of a window that

commanded a view of Elliot Bay, the Queen City's magnificent harbor.

"Fine view, that," was Bland's remark.

Sumner heard his step quicken, and, without turning his head, he knew that Bland had approached the wall where hung the detail map.

"It's one advantage of having an office on an upper floor," the lawyer continued. "But you can be sure they make us pay for it. And if the elevators ever went on strike—but there's no danger of that!"

When the junior again turned to face the desk, the map was gone from the wall. Its removal was a most convincing proof that it portrayed the real plans of the interests that had acquisitive eyes on Flattery coal. Now he was doubly forearmed.

"You'll pardon my absent-mindedness outside," apologized the lawyer. "I wrote that letter day before yesterday, and a great deal has come up since to make me forget the fact. When I wrote, I was most interested in seeing you. I thought I was in a position to make you an offer to buy your location outright, or, at least, to acquire an option covering the next few months."

"I'm open to propositions," said Sumner, hoping the other would mention some figure on which he could base his calculations, in view of the information that had just come to him.

"But the deal is all off, for the present, at least," returned Bland. "My clients have called a halt. Just why, I don't know, but orders are orders in these corporation matters. I was just about to write you that you need not take the trouble to come in."

This unexpected turn, calling off negotiations before they were begun, puzzled Sumner, but remembering the covert concealment of the map, he kept the fact from showing in his face. Evidently some game of bluff was under way, and he prepared to play it.

"In that case I'll not detain you any longer, Mr. Bland," he said, with unfeigned cheerfulness. Why should he not be cheerful, he asked himself, in view of what he had learned? That was worth a thousand trips to the city.

"Don't be in a hurry," urged Bland. "I'm still interested in coal, even if my present clients have weakened. From what I hear, you've got a big proposition out at the cape."

"It is a whale," said Sumner confidently.

"But it is going to take big capital to put those black diamonds on the market," the little man temporized. "I wouldn't worry about that, though, if I were you. Men with the proper amount of foresight will happen along one day, and you'll be able to turn a pretty penny. Aren't you rather young to have acquired such holdings?" The question was casual and the tone of it most friendly.

"Old enough to hold on until I get my price, I guess," was Sumner's return. He did not add, as he might have done with truth, that he had discovered the coal bed seven years before, when on a hunting trip near his home, and had been forced to keep it secret for three years until he became of age and could locate it for himself. But he did ask a question that gave the lawyer another uneasy moment: "I understand that the Tandy Estate owns a large tract to the east of me. Might I ask how the owner came to invest there?"

Bland's eyes were fixed upon the younger man, but to his relief they saw nothing but curiosity behind the question. "Tandy was a pioneer, and he knew the State like a book. His investments are scattered far and wide."

Sumner was at a loss to explain the lawyer's praise of the Dusk vein. The natural comments of a prospective purchaser would have been disparaging. Yet he refrained from further question-

ing, fearing to show an eagerness to sell, and arose from his chair.

"If you want a little gratuitous advice, young man," said Bland, walking with him toward the door, "hold to your coal property. If you go hawking it around the market, you'll never get a price. Wait until some one comes along who wants it."

The junior smiled his satisfaction as the door of the outer office closed behind him. In his gratuitous advice Bland had exposed his hand. For some reason he was not ready to negotiate at the moment, but the deal was by no means abandoned, and he desired to keep Sumner from seeking other markets.

Thanks to his floral trade and the remnant of his savings, he could afford to wait. Meanwhile he would inquire further into the coincidence of the appearance of his one enemy as a factor in the proposition.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CALL OF THE TRIBE.

THE tang in the air of the December afternoon was sharp enough to make strenuous muscular effort a delight. Robert Sumner was quite ready to agree with Zach Liddell that it was impossible to find a more exhilarating outdoor sport than acting as motive power to a single shell. As he bent his powerful back, dipped into the water with his purple-bladed oars, and pulled with an exact expenditure of strength, his slender craft shot through the lake like a thing alive.

An accurate balance, gained from his lifelong experience with canoes of the natives, had been his from the beginning. Nor had he taken long to acquire the knack of keeping the wheeled seat on its narrow track. Minor faults, such as rushing his slide, bending his arms, or letting his shoulders go out for the reach, he had corrected almost

as soon as the coach had pointed them out. He was now rowing with a finish that repeatedly called forth Liddell's praise. So far as form went, he might have foregone the single shell, but the eights composed of advanced oarsmen would not take to the lake for some weeks yet, and the coach advised that he correct an overdevelopment of arms and shoulder muscles by continuing with the single.

With a woven skullcap on his head and clad in a sweater coat, he was bowling up the lake, watching the play of the rowing muscles in his bare legs, when a contralto shout from inshore attracted his attention. Pausing at the end of a finished stroke, he looked up and saw Mrs. Sumner in a canoe. She beckoned him with her paddle, and a few long-swinged strokes brought him alongside.

"Bold Face, Fish, and Broad Head are at the cabin, boy," she said, in an expressionless sort of voice.

"Men from home?" he cried. "That should cheer you up, mother. You'll fairly revel in gossip of the bay. But why are you not entertaining them until I come?"

"They are too quiet," she returned. "Worried. Nothing to say except they must see you quick. That's why I came for you."

Robert expressed his surprise that the three most prominent men of the home village should particularly want to see him. This was the first time any one from Neah Bay had made any effort to seek out his secluded habitation.

"They could not find you at the school, so they came to the cabin," the woman continued. "There is trouble."

"Trouble?"

"With the government. They are sad."

The concluding remark brought some illumination, for he knew that his people had grave negotiations pending with the authorities at Washington. Still, he did not understand why they should

have sought him out. As his clothes were at the boathouse, he explained that he would have to row back there, but he promised to return home as rapidly as he could travel the short-cut trail he had blazed through the woods.

An hour later he stepped in upon the silent, somber-faced group in his own living room. Three old men sat in stiff discomfort in chairs before the fire. Lucy Sumner, overcome by the dignity of the unexpected guests from home, had drawn her inevitable rocking-chair into a corner.

"Greetings and salutations, old friends!" cried Robert cheerily. "This is a most delightful surprise. We are honored."

With their wrinkled faces as unmoved as if they had been graven images, the three visitors arose and solemnly shook his hand.

"It is well," said Bold Face, the youngest of the three.

"Good!" muttered Fish, who was distinguished by a head flattened into a peak.

A guttural grunt was all that came from Broad Head, whose coarse hair was as white as the crest of a wave.

Bold Face held the floor, his back to the fire, as the others resumed their chairs. "We have come——" he began.

Sumner checked him with a gesture. "But first, tell me that you will stay for supper." He interpreted the answering chorus of grunts as affirmative. "Mother, our friends will eat with us when you are ready," he said to her. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Nothing," she answered, disappearing into the lean-to that served them as kitchen.

"Now, chief, what brings you?" questioned Robert.

This titulary dignitary of the tribes which dwell among the Olympics lapsed at once into his native Chinook tongue, with which the junior was conversant, and poured out a stream of guttural

words that were rich in sibilant notes. It seemed that a group of capitalists had turned their covetous eyes upon the extensive area of tribal lands which lay between the straits and the mountains. These were rich in timber and mineral deposits, although not suitable for cultivation. Through certain political connections these capitalists had introduced a bill in Congress providing for a sale of the lands in bulk at a ridiculous price per acre. The argument was that the Indians were not making use of their property, that the timber and mineral wealth would forever be beyond their powers of development, and that it would be folly to throw the lands open to settlement in the usual way because of the nature of the country.

The chiefs, it seemed, had been apprised of the bill through the watchfulness of one of the Eastern societies that have the welfare of the red man at heart. They had protested to the commissioner of Indian affairs at the capital, and had won his sympathy.

"His last letter brings us to you," concluded Bold Face, handing over an official-looking envelope.

Sumner broke the silence he had maintained throughout the chief's outline of the case to the extent of one word: "Thieves!" Then he slipped the letter from the envelope and read:

I am greatly distressed over this wicked attempt to despoil your people of the Olympic lands, your title to which was established by solemn treaty and the pledged word of the government. The situation is most grave, for the clique that desires the land is possessed of far-reaching influence. The congressman who should be most alert to protect your interests seems to be hand and glove with the interests. The best that I have been able to do for you, through friends in Congress, is to have the bill referred to an impartial committee and to arrange for a public hearing.

This committee will be in Seattle on January 25th next, and will hear the Indian side of the controversy at a session held in the auditorium of the University of Washington on that date. It is my advice that you ap-

point as spokesman that tribesman best fitted to set your arguments against this despoliation before the congressmen. It will do no harm if as many of you as can do so attend the session, but leave the talking to one or at most two tribesmen. It would not be wise for you to retain a paid attorney whose influence could not be as great as that of one of the tribe.

The young man was silent for a moment before he returned the missive to Bold Face. "Thank Heaven, there's one official who is on the square!" he cried. "Whom have you decided on for the argument?"

"Robert Sumner, *tilacum!*" said the chief, accenting their word for friend.

The young man's surprise was genuine. That these venerable chiefs, whom he had known all his life, had come to enlist his aid in preparing their argument had occurred to him as soon as he had heard of the commission. However, he had not dreamed that they had decided on him as the one best equipped as spokesman.

His initial protest was impelled by modesty, but Chief Fish at once challenged it. "You are best fitted for this task, Robert Sumner," he said, with obvious pride. "As the stream runs to the ocean, so the ready speech passes your lips. As the arrow to the bow is, so is your argument to our salvation. Your words will take the direct way to the minds of these white chiefs. Remember that you are one of us. Do not desert us in this moment of our great extremity. We have but you to depend on."

"But—but the mixed blood!" protested the student; the flush of excitement staining the bronze of his face. "Would it not be better if a full member of the tribe——"

"There lies your chief advantage," continued Fish, who was noted among his people for his shrewd mind. "From us you have your keenness of observation, your love of freedom, and your contempt for the insect things of life.

With your white blood you inherit boldness, initiative, the ability to turn the hand and mind to whatever is before you. Surely the best of two races is better than the good and bad of one. We have watched you grow, Robert Sumner; we have all been fathers to you in the past; but now we come to you as brothers, asking you to help us who are weak, to help us with your strength."

The venerable Broad Head forgot his taciturnity long enough to add his word, which took the form of a paternal command and the promise that if Sumner saved the tribal lands he would never be without "good medicine."

Silence fell on them. The tribesmen watched, with alternating doubt and hope on their faces, the evident mental struggle of the young man. Was he going to shirk the task they brought to him? Would he turn his back upon them when so much was at stake? They followed his strong steps as he paced about the room, his head bent in deep thought, questioning his own fitness to act as spokesman. Then, suddenly their expressions showed as much of radiance as a Siwash ever permits to appear.

Robert Sumner had thrown back his head, and stood facing them with agreement in his first word.

"All right!" he cried. "As you seem agreed that this is my duty, I will do my best with it. I am one of you, and I am not ashamed of the fact. It seemed wisest to say nothing about my Indian blood when first I came to the university. Now it would be only weakness to conceal the fact any longer. Let every one know. My only hope is that I can live up to the part."

CHAPTER VIII. A HIGH RESOLVE.

AS the chiefs gathered about him, with expressions of pride and gratitude, Sumner regretted his momentary reluc-

tance to undertake what they asked. He assured them that he would at once begin a study of the treaties under which their lands had been ceded. He would search the law library of the university for precedents which would be applicable in their favor. The tribe should have the best that was in him, and he would not count the cost of time or effort.

After the chiefs had partaken of a cheerful meal they stalked off in the darkness toward the car line, heading for the steamer that had replaced the *Puget Belle* on the run to ports along the straits. Not until he was alone did the full meaning of his decision strike home to him. The disclosure to the world of the secret which he had guarded so zealously during the first years of his emergence from the narrow limits of the west-coast settlement was to come, after all, from his own lips. It would not be possible to wait for Burton Tandy to carry out the threat that had evidently been postponed through business policy. The moment he stepped forward as spokesman for the Olympic tribes every one would know that he was a Siwash, a half-breed.

Realization of what he had promised to face came over him as he considered the possibilities. Undoubtedly, the auditorium would be filled with fellow students, eager spectators of so unusual a feature of public business. The professors of American history, civics, psychology, and oratory would doubtless urge attendance upon their classes. It was incumbent upon him to strike heavily for his people in his address to the congressmen, but at the same time there was nothing to prevent his bespeaking justice for himself. He would fling them the challenge he had voiced to Tandy that day when exposure was first threatened. He would measure definitely and for all time the depth of the prejudice which these white broth-

ers and sisters probably felt. If they withheld fellowship, then he wanted no further association with them, and he would do without an education rather than take it from an alleged civilization that considered him a pariah.

One regret tinged his meditations upon the new situation: It would be necessary for him to give up his rowing practice. The preparation of his argument in behalf of his tribe would require hours of patient study. The time for this added effort could be taken neither from his university work nor from the flower growing upon which his livelihood depended. He decided to go to Zach Liddell with the frank statement that an added responsibility which could not be shirked would prevent his further use of the shell.

If Tandy's forecast of crew sentiment had been correct, he might better give up the oars then than later, when every one knew who he was. But if Tandy had been wrong, and if the crew men were still willing to row with a Siwash, there would still be time for him to make the effort.

As the fire in the hearth died down with the approach of bedtime, a vivid picture of Charlotte Crawford appeared in the gray-blue smoke of his pipe. It seemed that she was not, after all, to hear of his mixed origin from the lips of his rival. Yet he could imagine no more propitious setting for his self-disclosure than that which the hearing would afford when he stepped from out the group of his people to plead their protection from the rapacious white capitalists. He would see that she attended the public hearing.

This crowded day was not to end, however, without one more surprise. It was furnished by Mrs. Sumner as he started to close the cabin for the night.

"Wait, Robert," she said, coming into the circle of light thrown by his student lamp. All evening she had rocked

in moody silence at the side of the hearth. "No good can come of this thing which they ask you to do. It means trouble for you. The rich whites you oppose will never forget. They will ruin your life and mine. Leave this school before they drive you away. Let us go to my cousins in British Columbia, and start afresh. You will become a great man among white fathers who keep their word, and do not despise the Indian."

For a moment the young man stared at her in amazement. He had never known her to show initiative until the time, a few weeks before, when she had begged him to leave the university and return home. That she should so far forget the self-effacement inborn with Indian women as to propose this migration to the Canadian province across the straits was almost beyond belief. He recalled that the change in her dated from a visit which Tandy had paid her in his absence, and again he wondered what the senior might have said or threatened. Whatever had passed between them she had steadfastly refused to disclose, and he did not further question her now.

"Come with me, my boy," she urged.

"No, mother; we will stay and fight." The tone of his response was firm, although it lacked nothing of filial respect. "There is a man's work to be done. The chiefs have trusted it to me; they have returned home, with my acceptance of the responsibility, and, come what may, I shall not turn my back upon it."

"This has been an evil day," muttered the Indian woman, resigning herself to fate, with a helpless gesture. "I have done what I could to spare us. Now—"

"Now we will give them a battle to remember!" cried Sumner, tossing back the lock of black hair that, in meditative moments, had a habit of falling over his

forehead. "A battle they will remember!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHOSEN SPOKESMAN.

AS Robert Sumner predicted, the whole university, faculty and students alike, betrayed the liveliest interest in the visit of the congressional committee that was to hear the Indian protest. The arrival of six or seven war canoes, a day previous to that set for the hearing, intensified this interest, and gave a promise of "standing room only" that would have delighted the heart of a showman.

The chiefs, giving heed to the official suggestion that it would be advisable to make a tribal showing, had recruited a considerable delegation. As time was a lesser object to them than the cash necessary for steamer fares, they had loaded up their largest canoes with camping paraphernalia, hoisted sail, and essayed the long voyage. Although male tribesmen predominated, some had brought their women and children, and even a stray dog or two of nondescript breed. The camp which they established on the lake shore, near the campus, was sufficiently picturesque to draw many visitors.

At the hour of the hearing the great assembly hall in the auditorium was crowded. The two foremost rows of seats were reserved for the Indian visitors, although only the men of the delegation put in an appearance, the squaws being left in charge of the temporary camp. The showing which the Siwashes made was exceedingly creditable. Every man of them was fully clad in "store clothes." While flannel shirts predominated, several of the chiefs attained the dignity of starched collars. The faces of all were impressively serious.

The congressmen filed out upon the stage and took seats about a table which had been arranged for them at one side. They listened to a brief welcoming

speech from a faculty representative, after which their chairman announced that they were ready to hear any argument which the Indians cared to make against the sale of their lands.

With a dignity of manner for which the American native has ever been famous in official negotiations, Chief Bold Face arose and gravely saluted the national lawmakers.

"Won't you take the platform?" suggested the chairman.

"No," said the chief. "I speak only a moment."

Disappointment showed in the faces of the mass of students who filled the assembly room to the last chair. No hint of the real plan on which the Indians had decided had come to them. Their appetites were whetted for outbursts of Indian oratory, and no perfunctory speech would satisfy them. Even the congressman looked surprised.

"My tongue is thick," continued the chief. "My words are too light to express the heaviness of our hearts. In our own Chinook I might address you, but you would not understand. Upon one of our young men must fall the task of showing you the grievous wrong that threatens us. He has the education of you white brothers, but his heart is ours. The truth, and nothing but the truth, will spring from his lips to your understanding."

His steady gaze passed from face to face among the assembled students until it rested upon Sumner's tense countenance.

"Come, my son!" he said, gesturing dramatically toward the stage.

A murmur of astonishment, a whisper of incredulity, ran through the student body when the "mystery student" arose from his seat at the end of the row and stepped forward confidently. As he passed Bold Face, the chief clapped an encouraging hand upon his shoulder, and guttural exclamations of

approval came from the throats of other tribesmen.

In her seat, halfway back in the center section, sat Charlotte Crawford, scarce believing her senses, striving valiantly to mask her surprise, in case any of the few intimates who knew of her friendship for the junior should be within visual range.

So this was the cloud which had hung over her rescuer! Here at last was the reason for his studied aloofness, his persistent self-effacement, his refusal to respond to social overtures. A half-breed Siwash! Her mind seethed with conflicting emotions. She could not think. Dimly she realized that she would rather, at that moment, be anywhere else than where she was.

She knew that he had reached the stage by now, had bowed to the congressmen, and was speaking. She forced herself to listen.

"If you will bear with me one moment," he said, "I shall make my own position clear, establish my privilege to speak for the men and women, and particularly for the little children, of the Olympic tribes. I am a Siwash—a half-breed Indian!" He threw back his head as he spoke, and from several quarters Charlotte heard the comment whispered that he did not look the part. "This is the third year of my residence in this institution, and the first time it has seemed advisable to declare my racial mixture. My reasons for silence in the past are varied. A disinclination for controversy was one. A desire to gain an education without the handicap of possible prejudice was another. Shame for my mother's race was at no time a part of it. Such shame as I have is for my white father, whom I have never seen with knowing eyes, for he deserted us before I had learned to walk. Gladly do I now cast my lot with my red kinsmen, my brothers before you. I am a Siwash, and as such I come to you with our plea for justice."

Although his eyes were upon the congressmen, none could doubt that this opening was particularly directed to his fellow students, the unofficial majority of his audience. But his words were not without effect upon the three law-makers whom he particularly desired to move. No amount of preparation could have worded a preface more sure of capturing their sympathy. His manly stand for his own people, his defiance of any imputation of inequality for these original Americans, of which he was one, could not fail to appeal.

In one of the back rows sat Burton Tandy, in sullen-faced amazement. It seemed that his one hold upon his rival was slipping away. "The breed" had capitalized his disadvantage of birth, and seemed about to declare dividends of popularity because of it. Never before had Robert Sumner loomed so ominously before him. He recalled the admonition of R. Choate Bland that there was danger to their plans in arousing the young man from the straits. It seemed now that the junior had aroused himself. Yet, for that moment at least, the senior was powerless to do aught but sit and listen.

On the stage, the pleader for the Indians had plunged into a brief review of the treaties with the government that had led to the final settlement of the tribes in the shadow of the Coast Range. They had given full value in the lands they had formerly occupied along Puget Sound for the new home to which they had been removed. The fee to the tract which was now in jeopardy, he declared, rested absolutely in them.

"It is intolerable to believe," he cried, "that the highest legislative body in this republic will ignore the essential feature of an agreement entered into with the utmost solemnity of form; that Congress will force this sale upon us because we are too feeble to resist the affront."

He took up the arguments which lob-

byists for interested corporations had offered to Congress as reason for the sale. It was true that the land was not such as could profitably be thrown open to settlement, as had been so many other reservations in different parts of the West. Its formation did not lend itself to cultivation, and it would never be valuable either for farming or grazing.

Yet these mountainous acres did hold a vast wealth of timber, of coal, of oil, and of precious metals, to say nothing of the water power that awaited development. There was no possible way of estimating the value of this assorted treasure, but it was preposterous, he argued, to sell the vast tract for a few dollars an acre—dollars which would be distributed to the Indians in driblets, and do them more harm than good.

One of the congressmen interrupted to ask whether the attitude of the Indians against the sale was not analogous to the dog-in-the-manger fable. "Your people cannot develop the lands for themselves," he suggested, "and do not want to see others make use of them."

The junior had foreseen this objection, and was ready with an answer that seemed not less daring because it was obviously practical.

"My people would welcome development if only their interests were conserved," he assured them. "Why would it not be wise to organize the allied tribes into a joint stock company, in which every member should be an equal shareholder? Then the natural assets of the reservation might be released for development to capitalists among the whites, under such regulations as the government thought advisable, the returns to be paid to the stockholders at periodic intervals in the form of corporate dividends?"

Sumner closed with a final plea that they be given a chance to administer this wealth under conditions that would assure them something like a just portion of its return. Presenting each mem-

ber of the committee with a copy of the written brief which he had prepared, he left the platform and dropped into an empty seat beside the three chiefs, among his own people.

The moment of silence which followed his final appeal was broken by a ripple of applause that started somewhere among the students and grew into an uproar. If the verdict had rested with the undergraduates, the Indians would have won hands down.

When quiet was restored, the chairman of the committee, smiling amiably, stepped forward. "If we were in Congress," he said, "it would be necessary for the sergeant-at-arms to clear the gallery after such a demonstration. Under existing circumstances, however, we withhold our frowns. Without entering into the merits of the grave matter before us, I am impelled to congratulate the tribes from the Olympic country on the possession of so logical an advocate as the young man who has just addressed us. Any university might well be proud to have such a man among its undergraduates, and I am glad that you have already signified your approval of his stand in behalf of his people. All that he has said shall have our earnest consideration."

When the congressmen had filed out, Robert Sumner signaled to his people that the hearing was ended, and started with them down the center aisle. At one side an enthusiastic cheer leader mounted a chair.

"Now, then, fellows," he cried, "a long one for Bob Sumner!"

The yell of the college, composed in part of Siwash words, rang out with the force of hundreds of throats, and at the end, Sumner's name, thrice repeated, was given with a will. Of the varied notes, none was more ringing with enthusiasm than that of Charlotte Crawford, whose mystery student no longer existed, but was replaced by one who

had proven himself so candid and brave.

Burton Tandy did not tarry about the campus that day, but hurried into Seattle to consult Attorney Bland upon the unexpected development.

Of those who sought out Robert Sumner after the Indians had broken camp, none was more enthusiastic than Professor Alex. Darrow, under whom he was specializing in biology.

"If I were professor of oratory, Sumner," said the giant faculty member heartily, "I should hand you all the credits in the course for your performance this morning. How is it that you never happened to mention you are of Indian blood on one parental side?"

"When I first came to the university there was no one here who knew of me, and until my people happened to need me it seemed wisest to say nothing about my extraction," answered the junior. "I feared a prejudice which, from the way I was treated to-day, proves to have been groundless."

"But don't you realize what a promising study in heredity you present?" cried the enthusiastic experimenter. "The mere fact of your having so few Indian characteristics that in more than two years none suspected you, marks a unique case. Who was your father—what sort of man, I mean?"

"When I learned, some years ago, that my father was a white man, I had a natural curiosity to learn who he was and what had become of him," replied Sumner. "It proved one of the few subjects on which my mother has been evasive with me. On seeing how my questions distressed her, I ceased asking. The men of the tribe to whom I appealed were nearly as unsatisfactory. The subject is not a pleasing one to them. They declared that he had left the straits when I was a baby, and that they had heard nothing further from him."

"But we'll have to know," urged the

professor. "We must find out all about him. You owe it to yourself."

As he walked home through the timber that evening, Robert Sumner found that the question raised by Professor Darrow remained uppermost in his mind. Who was his father? That mystery of his life, which had been stilled since the failure of his early efforts, demanded solution. He felt anew a poignant desire to know himself. In no other way could he realize his limitations or take measures to combat them. A decision to renew his efforts was solemnly declared to the wind that whispered through the cedars.

CHAPTER X.

NO BAR SINISTER.

THE days immediately following his plea for the Olympic tribes were full of readjustment for Robert Sumner. In a hundred ways he was made to feel that the student body approved of his stand. With one bound he had sprung from obscurity into a prominence that was trying to his naturally retiring disposition. In one day he had transformed himself from the least-known student into the one most prominent. He might have broken a track record, or carried over a winning touchdown, with far less notoriety.

The few with whom he had had a speaking acquaintance, through class or laboratory work, were kept busy introducing others who had never noticed him in former days. Many of these, he knew, were moved only by curiosity, others were of the follow-the-crowd type, who feared being themselves unknown by not having met the new celebrity. But the number who seemed sincere in seeking acquaintance was large enough to warm his heart and to give him a new interest in life.

He was moved to wonder where he had ever gained the impression that his Indian ancestry would be a bar to social

life at the university. One faculty member, after congratulating him on his argument, pointed out that Washington was a university of pioneers, and expressed regret that more Indian youths did not prepare themselves to take advantage of its educational offerings.

The president of the Associated Students, which office is the highest honor at the gift of the undergraduates, sought him out, and secured his promise to take charge of the trail-blazing squad that was to run lines for new campus paths. These the students would build on "Campus Day," early in March, when every one turns out for an old-fashioned out-of-doors house cleaning.

Perhaps the most striking instance that college democracy was real came when a senior member of one of the most powerful fraternities invited him to dinner at the chapter house.

Chance kept him on the anxious seat for a time regarding the matter which was nearest his heart—the attitude of the girl he had saved from the wreck. He knew only that she had been one of the throng in the auditorium that eventful morning. But he had been too entirely wrapped up in his plea to send even a glance in the direction of her seat. His experience with femininity was so limited that he had no basis for supposition regarding the effect upon her of his startling declaration as to his race, and he anxiously awaited their first chance meeting on the campus, when a single glance would assure him of her continued friendship or make him miserable again.

This afternoon, as he stood in the classic portal of the chemistry building, he saw her coming up the roadway, with the swinging style characteristic of the outdoor life to which she was devoted. Satisfied that she had not yet noticed him, he was seized with a momentary temptation to evade the issue by retreating into the building. The results of that first meeting were bound to be

momentous for him, either for joy or sorrow, and he dreaded learning his fate.

But at once he took a grip upon himself, chiding his thought of retreat as unworthy his new attitude toward himself. Timing his pace so that he would reach the foot of the broad flight of stone steps as she passed, he started toward her. His heart was beating tumultuously, but he held firm in his determination that the question of her friendship—whether or no it was broad enough to include a half-breed—should be definitely settled without further delay.

When she was forty paces up the road, and he was on the last flight of steps, he felt rather than saw that she had noticed him. The moment, for him, was cruel with suspense; then her cordial greeting banished all fears.

"Hello!" she called. "Hello, Demosthenes Sumner! I'm going your way, if you'll wait a moment!"

The girl had not changed. She knew he was a Siwash, and she was still his friend. The flush that suffused his bronze cheeks was one of shame that he had ever questioned so fine a young woman. He did not try to keep the note of glad relief out of his voice as he returned her salutation.

"First off," she said, on joining him, "let me tell you that it was splendid. I heard every word of your plea, and if Congress doesn't let your people keep their lands— Well, I'll think a lot less of that august body than I do now."

"You were surprised?" he asked.

"I was surprised the first minute or two. Every one was. You might have prepared me, at least; but I think I understand how you felt. Of course, you had misjudged us, but you could not have known. That only made what you did all the finer. I'm glad you've found out that we're not snobs."

"Every one has been very kind, a sort of treatment we Indians don't al-

ways get from our white brothers. It makes me want to do something big—something for so real a university."

"The call for candidates for the varsity crew will be posted to-morrow, I hear," she said significantly.

A shadow crossed his face. "I'm not sure that I'll be welcome at the boat-house. Liddell did not like the idea of my breaking training. You see, I could not go into detail regarding my reasons."

"But he knows the reasons now, you may be sure," she continued urgently. "Of course, with that argument to prepare, you had no time to spare for anything else. The coach will understand, and if I were you I'd go to him at once. I'm particularly and personally anxious that you make the crew, for mother has promised to take me to Poughkeepsie next June to see our eight row—and win."

Sumner congratulated her at the pleasant prospect of a trip across the continent, but he added that so far as his rowing was concerned there were other factors than the coach's displeasure which might prevent his trying. There was, for instance, at least one member of the crew squad who did not care to row in the same boat with a Siwash.

"I know the member you have in mind," cried Charlotte, her eyes flashing, "and I don't mind telling you that I am indignant with Burton Tandy! He had better leave his snobbery in Seattle, or he'll find himself out of the boat. Why does he hate you so? It cannot be entirely because—"

"He knew I was an Indian long before I announced the fact," said the young man dispassionately. "Unless I followed a certain course which he laid down he was going to expose me. I did not obey, yet for some reason he held his tongue. Anyway, Miss Crawford, it might be best for the college if I forget rowing. I was thinking of try-

ing for the track team. I can run a little, naturally, since foot racing has always been one of our—”

“Don’t you think of track!” she interrupted. “You are built to order for the crew, so do make peace with Liddell.”

The fact that his real interest was in the aquatic sport, as much as the girl’s urging, led him that very afternoon to the boathouse. But peacemaking proved to have no place on the program, as he speedily learned, to his sorrow.

“Well, *tilacum*, it’s about time you were reporting to Uncle Zach that you are ready to become a galley slave for the honor of the purple and gold.” The coach’s use of the Chinook word for “friend” was his way of proving that he recognized no lines of caste when it came to picking crew material.

“I was sorry I had to quit the single shell,” said Sumner, “but I had no choice under the circumstances. Are you sure that my Indian origin isn’t—”

“Enough on that point, Sumner,” Liddell interposed. “There is only one bar sinister in athletics in this fount of learning, and that is professionalism. I know you’re O. K. on that score. Report to-morrow at four, and prove to me that my eyes still know an oarsman when they see one.”

It seemed to Sumner that nothing was left to complete his happiness. He was known by all the university for what he really was, and accepted at par by all except Tandy and a few of his satellites, who did not count. His favorite sport was open to him, and a seat in the Poughkeepsie boat would be his, if he earned it. He had faced his duty toward his people, and done his best for them. His flowers were blooming as they never had before, so he was certain of making his financial “riffle.” Miss Crawford, the one woman of his interest, had again proven her friendship, and friendship was all he had ever

aspired for in her case. What more could a human being ask?

Yet there was something more, as he realized poignantly when he entered the cabin and his eyes caught the hopeless look upon Mrs. Sumner’s face. Her eyes were so reddened that he would have believed she had been crying had he not known her unemotional nature. That she was wretched was one flaw he had overlooked. The reason for her state of mind mystified him. The visit of women friends from the home tribe, who had made the canoe voyage with the chiefs, had not served to cheer her. And her doleful state distressed him the more now that his own affairs were working out so nicely.

Crossing the room, he stood behind her chair, and for a moment stroked her shining black hair, which she wore parted in the center and brushed back severely into a knot upon her neck.

“Can’t you tell me the trouble, mother?” he said, drawing up a chair and sitting down beside her. “If there is anything I can do to bring back your happiness, tell me. Do you want to return to the bay and open the little house there?”

She looked up quickly. “Will you come with me?”

“You should not ask the impossible, mother,” he said gently. “You know how hard I have worked to get an education, and there must be another whole year of school before I can settle down.”

The hopeless expression returned. “It is not well for you to stay here, now that every one knows. There is danger to you, to me, to all of us.”

“What danger?” he asked.

It was not the first time she had spoken vaguely of danger, and now, as on past occasions, he failed to get any idea of its form. He was beginning to believe that it was a figment of her imagination, and to that, of course, he could not yield his life’s ambition.

There was one other subject that had

lately occupied much of his thought, on which she was equally unsatisfactory. Each time he had returned to the subject of his father she had shown great agitation. Once, when he had pressed his questions more strongly, she flashed upon him the first angry look he had ever received from her. He knew that the subject must be painful to her, but felt that he had the right to know what she could tell him, and he was growing impatient.

This evening, however, he made no effort to resume the examination. Going into the kitchen, with the idea of preparing the evening meal, in view of her seeming indisposition, he had barely lighted the fire when she appeared, and waved him from the lean-to. From the fact that she soon set two of his favorite dishes before him, he knew that she regretted having troubled him.

Later, as he sat over his books at the study table, there flashed into his mind a likely way of learning about his father without troubling her further. At once he acted upon the inspiration, to the extent of writing a letter.

CHAPTER XI.

TROUBLED CONSCiences.

THE dining room of the club in which R. Choate Bland held a highly valued membership was quite deserted when the lawyer ushered in his most profitable client. Yielding to epicurean vanity, he ordered a carefully selected repast; then, as the waiter disappeared with noiseless tread, he turned to his guest.

"Now, Burton, begin your tale of woe, though the dinner which I have just ordered deserves a more pleasant appetizer. What has your Siwash friend been up to?"

"Things couldn't be worse out at the U," said Tandy, his voice heavy with gloom. "That speech for the tribe was a ten strike, and he's got brains enough

to make the most of it. He's playing the hero all over the campus, and people are beginning to ask who his white father was."

"The devil they are!" muttered Bland. "What does any one want to know that for?"

"What is there those faculty bugs don't want to know? They're cracked on experimentation. This morning I heard Professor Darrow saying what a wonderful study in heredity Sumner would present if they could only secure data on the paternal side. If they ask enough questions, they'll stumble on something, sooner or later, and then there will——"

"Then I know a pair of wise birds who'll have to get out from under."

"Well, here's one bird that won't do anything of the sort," declared Tandy. "If you think I'm going to give in to that upstart from the straits, you've sadly mistaken your best meal ticket. A little nerve just now will pull us through with every ducat present and accounted for."

Planting his elbows on the table, Bland made a forked rest for his head with his hands and lapsed into meditation. The Tandy estate was, indeed, his "best meal ticket," as the younger man put it, and the attorney had no idea of loosening his clutch upon it, unless that became absolutely necessary to assure his own safety. Indeed, he had gone so deeply into the daring scheme which Burton Tandy had proposed on his father's death, two years before, that he doubted his ability to get out clean if the storm ever broke. At the time, the possible complication of Robert Sumner's appearance in any prominent rôle had seemed outside the probabilities. Certainly fate had been playing them some sorry tricks of late.

"If you could only find a way of getting him back on the reservation, where he belongs," suggested the attorney, after a considerable period of medita-

tion. "How about that girl he's interested in? If she'd insult him, now, mightn't he take to the woods with a broken heart?"

"Forget the girl, Bland! In the first place, she's not going to do any insulting in that quarter. I saw her yesterday, walking with him on the campus. She knows I hate him. I didn't play the game right in the first instance. She's told me I needn't mention him, and unless I lie low I'm in danger of losing out with her altogether."

"Don't they sometimes expel young men who are caught cheating in examinations?" the attorney asked suggestively.

"Sumner isn't that sort. He's straight—worse luck!"

"But you could plant——"

"Too dangerous," vetoed the senior. "He's got too much reputation for high marks behind him. There's a bare chance of our doing something with the old woman. I threw another scare into her to-day. He thinks a lot of her, and she may persuade him to go back with her, but——"

The return of the waiter forced a temporary silence.

When they were again alone, Bland spoke: "A word of caution, friend Burton. Be mighty careful about going to see the mother. If he finds you prowling around there, he'll come down on you hard physically. It may also set him thinking."

Tandy offered prompt assurance that he was using all necessary caution, adding that he held so powerful a club over the Indian woman that she would not dream of reporting his visits.

"I don't like the look of it," complained Bland.

"No more do I," returned the student. "Don't you think it's about time you destroyed the paper in the case?"

"With two witnesses alive? You're mad, Burton!"

"The witnesses are far enough away.

They'll never be heard from. Burn the confounded thing up. Then, if he ever does stumble on the truth, he'll whistle himself hoarse trying to prove anything."

"We'll have nothing of that sort, Burton," said Bland decisively. "If those witnesses turn up, I can make another search, and save myself by finding the document. But if it's burned, they'll get me for more than carelessness. No, sir! That's my only life preserver, and I'll hold to it to the death!"

"You've got no nerve!" declared Tandy, with indignation.

For a time, both gave their outward attention to the food that had been placed before them, but neither had a really appreciative appetite.

"You'd better find some way of getting him back where he came from," said the attorney finally. "He seems to be a sensitive customer. Couldn't you make a monkey of him, wound his vanity, get the fellows laughing at him? Heavens, if I had as much at stake as you have, I'd find a way!"

"I've got one scheme up my sleeve," admitted Tandy. "Somebody told him he was an oarsman, and he's set his heart on making the crew. Miss Crawford is egging him on, I believe, and the coach has encouraged him. Now, I've got some influence in rowing circles, pull a pretty strong oar myself, and helped them raise the money to send the crew East last year. I may be able to put the kibosh on him a little later. Quiet work, you know. A whisper here and there that an Indian on the eight won't help our standing any in the East. If I can get two or three others to pull against him, he'll lose the boat, and the jar may break his nerve. His mother is anxious enough to join some relatives over in British Columbia, but I suppose that is too much to hope for."

In part to ease an exceedingly guilty conscience, R. Choate Bland arose, and

began to pace the deserted dining room with a jerky, nervous step. In his mind he was revolving the probabilities of a daring idea that had come to him while Tandy was speaking. This, he decided, involved a greater risk than he cared to run except as an extreme measure, but there was the advantage that, if it worked, the danger to Burton Tandy's heritage, which now threatened, would be dissipated for all time.

"It might be done," he said aloud, as he completed one of his turns about the room.

"What might be done, you thinking pedestrian?" demanded Tandy, who was familiar with Bland's mental processes.

"I was thinking that if your plans fall through, and the troublesome one insists on learning about his father, we might invent one for him."

The senior laughed. "You'd better try for a patent on that invention, Bland. We couldn't invent a father!"

"We might hire an aged dodderer to throw open his arms to his noble child. You say you have a hold on the squaw. Would it carry that far? She is the only one competent to enter objection."

Tandy's expression brightened as he caught the scope of the attorney's suggestion. "I declare, you did have an inspiration, after all! The woman will do as I tell her, for reasons best known to the two of us. Have you any one in mind for the parental rôle?"

"Not so fast, young man," checked Bland, resuming his chair at the table as the coffee was brought in. "That scheme is a wild one, at best, and only to be used if the case reaches the stage of last resort. It means giving at least one other scoundrel a grip on us, and it's bound to be expensive. You go on with your plan to shame the Siwash back into the obscurity from which he should never have been permitted to emerge."

"I'll do it; never fear," returned Tandy. "Keep your eye on me. I'll work at it day and night, if necessary.

Before I am through with Robert Sumner he'll not only give up the attempt to finish his college course, but in disgrace he'll be looking for a place to hide his head."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Further chapters of this serial will be found in the next number of TOP-NOTCH, out May 15th. This magazine is published on the 1st and 15th of every month. Back numbers may be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

Preferred Home Work

A WEALTHY but illiterate Glasgow ironmaster was so greatly impressed by a friend's library that he decided to have one of his own.

One day he called at a well-known bookseller's and asked to see the proprietor.

"I want you to get me a leebrary," he said.

"Certainly, Mr. Blank," replied the bookseller, "I shall be very pleased to supply you. Can you let me have a list of any particular books you want?"

"Na, na; ye ken mair aboot buiks than me," the ironmaster told him. "Ye can choose them yourself."

"Very good; then you leave the selection in my hands. Now, how would you like the books bound? Would you like to have them bound in *Russia* or *Morocco*?"

"Russia! Morocco!" gasped the astonished ironmaster. "Can ye not get them bound in *Glasca*?"

At His End

THE impatient man was experiencing a great deal of difficulty in transmitting a message over the telephone.

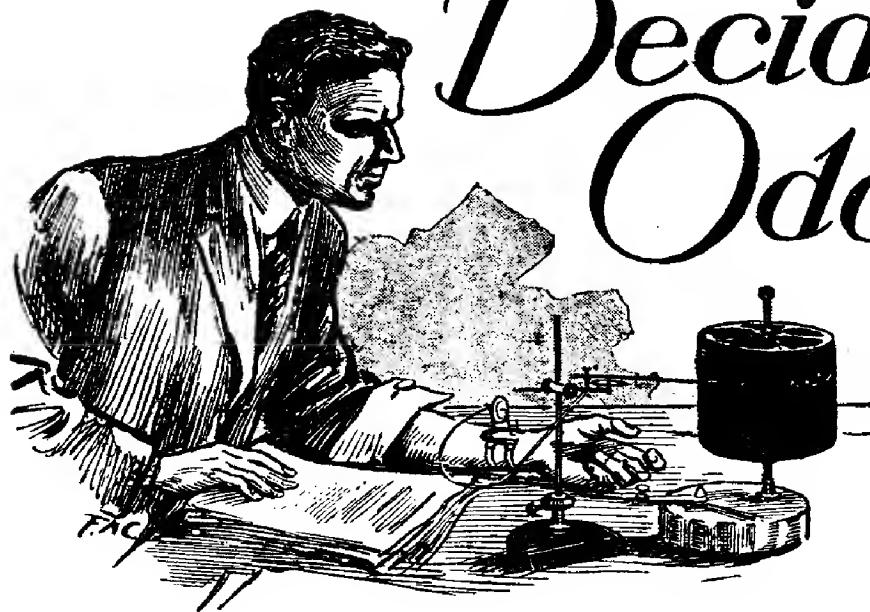
Finally he lost his temper and shouted: "Who is the hopeless idiot at the end of this line?"

"I give it up," a sweet feminine voice replied. "Who are you?"

Decidedly Odd

By

Edwin Balmer
and
William MacHarg



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

ADVERTISED IN CIPHER.

A  NE rainy morning in April, Luther Trant sat alone in his office. On his wrist as he bent closely over a heap of typewritten pages spread before him on his desk, a small instrument in continual motion ticked like a watch. It was for him an hour of idleness; he was reading fiction. And, with his passion for making visible and recording the workings of the mind, he was taking a permanent record of his feelings as he read.

The instrument strapped on Trant's arm was called a sphygmograph. It carried a small steel rod which pressed tightly on his wrist artery. This rod, rising and falling with each rush of the blood wave through the artery, transmitted its motion to a system of small levers. These levers operated a pencil point, which touched the surface of a revolving drum. Trant had adjusted around this drum a strip of smoked paper, the pencil point traced on its sooty surface, and a continuous wavy line

which rose and fell with each beat of the psychologist's pulse.

As the interest of the story gripped Trant, this wavy line grew flatter, with elevations farther apart. When the interest flagged, his pulse returned to its normal beat and the line became regular in its undulations. At an exciting incident, the elevations swelled to greater height. And the psychologist was noting with satisfaction how the continual variations of the line gave definite record of the story's sustained power, when he was interrupted by the sharp ring of his telephone.

An excited, choleric voice came over the wire:

"Mr. Trant? . . . This is Cuthbert Edwards, of Cuthbert Edwards & Co., Michigan Avenue. You have received a communication from my son Winton this morning? Is he there now? . . . No? Then he will reach your office in a very few minutes. I want nothing done in the matter! You understand! I will reach your office myself as soon as possible—probably within fifteen minutes—and explain."

The sentence ended with a bump, as Cuthbert Edwards slammed his receiver back upon its hook. The psychologist, who would have recognized the name—even if not forewarned by the communication he had received that morning—as the conservative head of one of the oldest and most “exclusive” families of New England Puritan extraction, detached the sphygmograph from his wrist and drew toward him and reread the fantastic advertisement that had come to him inclosed in Winton Edwards’ letter. Apparently it had been cut from the classified columns of one of the big dailies:

EVA: The seventeenth of the tenth! Since you and your own are safe, do you become insensible that others now again wait in your place? And those that swing in the wind! Have you forgot? If you remember and are true, communicate. And you can help save them all! N. M. 15, 45, 11, 31; 7, 13, 32, 45; 13, 36.

The letter, to the first page of which the advertisement had been pinned, was dated the same day he had received it, postmarked three o’clock that morning, and written in the scrawling hand of a young man under strong emotion:

DEAR SIR: Before coming to consult you, I send for your consideration the advertisement you will find inclosed. This advertisement is the one tangible piece of evidence of the amazing and inexplicable influence possessed by the “hammering man” over my fiancée, Miss Eva Silber. This influence has forced her to refuse to marry me, to tell me that I must think of her only as if she were dead.

This advertisement appeared first on last Monday morning in the classified columns of three Chicago papers published in English, and in the German *A—*. On Tuesday, it appeared in the same morning papers and in four evening papers and the German *A—*. It was submitted to each newspaper by mail, with no address or information other than the text as here printed, with three dollars in currency inclosed in each case to pay for its insertion. For Heaven’s sake help me, Mr. Trant! I will call on you this morning, as soon as I think you are at your office.

WINTON EDWARDS.

The psychologist had hardly finished this letter, when rapid footsteps in the corridor outside stopped at his office door. Never had there been a more striking entrance into Trant’s office than that of the young man who now burst in—disheveled, wet with the rain, his eyes red for want of sleep.

“She has left me, Mr. Trant!” he cried, with no prelude. “She has gone!”

As he sank dazedly into a chair, he pulled from his pocket a small leather case and handed it to the psychologist. Within was the photograph of a remarkably handsome girl in her early twenties—a girl sobered by some unusual experience, as showed most plainly in the poise of her little round head wrapped with its braid of lustrous hair, and the shadow that lurked in the steadfast eyes, though they were smiling, and the full lips were smiling, too.

“You are, I suppose, Mr. Winton Edwards,” said Trant, picking up the letter on his desk. “Now, if you have come to me for help, Mr. Edwards, you must first give me all the information of the case that you have.”

“That is Eva Silber,” young Edwards replied. “Miss Silber had been employed by us a little over a year. She came to us in answer to an advertisement. She gave us no information in regard to herself when she came, and she has given none since. Because of her marked ability my father put her in complete charge of the house’s correspondence with our foreign agents; for in addition to English, she speaks and writes fluently German, French, the Magyar dialect of Hungary, Russian, and Spanish.

“I was in love with her almost from the first,” he went on, “in spite of my father’s objection to the attachment. The first Edwards of our family, Mr. Trant, came to Massachusetts in 1660. So my father has the idea that anybody who came later cannot possibly be our equal; and Miss Silber, who came to

America to work—the women of our family have stayed idly at home—did not get here until a short time ago."

"Coming from where?" asked the psychologist.

"I don't know," the young man answered simply. "I think she is an Austrian, for the Magyar dialect she speaks is the least likely of the languages she knows to have been learned by choice. I spoke of this to her once, and she did not contradict me." He paused to control his agitation, and then went on: "She had, so far as I know, no friends. So you see, Mr. Trant, that all that makes my father's consent to my marrying her only a greater proof of her evident goodness and charm!"

"Then he did consent to your marrying her?" Trant interjected.

"Yes; two weeks ago. I had begged and begged her, but she never had been willing to give me her promise. A week ago last Wednesday, after she had known for more than a week that father had agreed to it, she finally consented—but only conditionally. I was going away for a short business trip, and Eva told me that she wanted that much time to think it over, but that when I came back she would tell me all about herself and, if I still wanted to marry her after hearing it, she would marry me. I never imagined that any one could force her to change her mind!"

"Yet she did change her mind, you think?" put in Trant.

"Without question, Mr. Trant!" was the emphatic reply. "And it seems to have been wholly because of the visit of the 'hammering man,' who came to see her at the office the day after I left Chicago. It sounds queer to call him that, but I do not know his name, nor anything about him, except the fact of his hammering."

"But if the people in the office saw him, you have at least his description," said Trant.

"They say he was unusually large, gross, almost bestial in appearance, and red-headed. He was plainly dressed. He asked to see Eva. When she caught sight of him she turned back and refused to speak with him."

"How did the man take her refusal?" was the next question.

"He seemed very angry for a moment, and then went out into the public corridor," replied Edwards. "For a long time he walked back and forth in the corridor, muttering to himself. The people in the office had practically forgotten him when they were startled by a noise of hammering or pounding in the corridor. One wall of the inner office where Eva had her desk is formed by the wall of the corridor, and the man was beating upon it with his fists."

"Hammering excitedly?" asked Trant.

"No; in a rather deliberate and measured manner. My father, who heard the sound, says it was so very distinctive as to be recognizable if heard again."

"Odd!" said Trant. "And what effect did this have on Miss Silber?"

"That is the strangest part of it. Eva had seemed worried and troubled ever since she learned the man was there, but this hammering seemed to agitate and disturb her out of all reason. At the end of the day's business she went to my father and abruptly resigned the position of trust she held with us. My father, surprised and angry at her refusal to give a reason for this action, accepted her resignation."

"You do not happen to know whether, before this visit, Miss Silber had received any letter which troubled her," said Trant.

"She may have received a message at her house, but not at the office," admitted the young man. "However, there is something still more mysterious. On Sunday, my father, sorry that

he had accepted her resignation so promptly, in view of our relationship, ordered the motor and went out to see her. But—good heavens!"

CHAPTER II.

THE ANNIVERSARY.

THE loud rat-tat-tat of a cane had shaken Trant's door and cracked its ground glass from corner to corner, and the door was flung open to admit a determined little man, whose carefully groomed pink-and-whiteness was accentuated by his anger.

"Winton, go home!" The elder Edwards glared sternly at his son, and then about the office. "Mr. Trant—you are Mr. Trant, I suppose—I want you to have nothing to do with this matter. I prefer to let the whole affair drop where it is."

"I reserve the right, Mr. Edwards," the psychologist said, rising, "to take up or drop cases only as I myself see fit. I have heard nothing yet in your son's story to explain why you do not want the case investigated."

"Then you shall have it explained," Cuthbert Edwards asserted. "I called on Miss Silber last Sunday, and it is because of what I learned there that I want Winton to have nothing more to do with her. I went to Miss Silber on Sunday, Mr. Trant, feeling that I had been too hasty on Thursday. I offered her an apology and was reasoning with her when I heard suddenly, in an upper room, the same noises that had so disturbed the quiet of my office on Thursday afternoon!"

"You mean the hammering?" asked Trant.

"Precisely, Mr. Trant; the hammering! If you had heard that sound yourself, you would know that it is a very definite and distinctive blow, given according to some intentional arrangement. I no sooner heard it and saw the uneasiness it again caused in Miss

Silber, than I became certain that the same disreputable man who had been to see her at my office was then housed in her very home. I insisted, as she was my son's promised wife, on searching the house."

"Did you find him?" Trant inquired sharply.

"No, I did not, Mr. Trant, though I went into every room and opened every closet. I found only what appeared to be the usual inmates of the house—Miss Silber's father and the woman who keeps house for her."

"Miss Silber's father! Has Miss Silber a father?" Trant interrupted.

"He is hardly worth mentioning, Mr. Trant," the younger Edwards explained. "He must have suffered at some time from a brain trouble that has partly deprived him of his faculties, I believe. Neither he nor the house-keeper, who is not in Eva's confidence, is likely to be able to help us in this matter."

"The man may have slipped out of the house unseen," suggested Trant.

"Quite impossible," Cuthbert Edwards asserted. "Miss Silber lived in a little house west of Ravenswood. There are very few houses, none within at least a quarter of a mile of her. The ground is flat, and no one could have got away without being seen by me."

"Your story so far is certainly very peculiar," the psychologist commented, "and it gains interest with every detail. Are you certain it was not this second interview with your father"—he turned again to the younger man—"that made Miss Silber refuse you?"

"No; it was not. When I got back yesterday and learned from father what had happened, I went out at once to Eva at her home. She had changed utterly; not in her feelings toward me, for I felt certain even then that she loved me—but an influence—the influence of this man—had come between

us. She told me there was no longer any chance of her marrying. She refused the explanation she had promised to make to me. She told me to go away and forget her, or—as I wrote you—to think of her as dead.

"You can imagine my feelings," he went on. "I could not sleep last night after I had left her. As I was wandering about the house, I saw the evening paper lying spread out on the library table and my eye caught her name in it. It was in the advertisement that I sent you, Mr. Trant. Late as it was, I called up the newspaper offices and learned the facts regarding its insertion. At daybreak I motored out to see Eva. The house was empty. I went round it in the mud and rain, peering in at the windows. Even the house-keeper was no longer there, and the neighbors could tell me nothing of the time or manner of their leaving; nor has any word come from her to the office."

"That is all, then," the psychologist said thoughtfully. "'The seventeenth of the tenth,'" he reread the beginning of the advertisement. "That is, of course, a date, the seventeenth of the tenth month, and it is put there to recall to Miss Silber some event of which it would be sure to remind her. I suppose you know of no private significance this date might have for her, or you would have mentioned it."

"None on the seventeenth; no, Mr. Trant," young Edwards replied. "If it were only the thirtieth I might help you; for I know that on that date Eva celebrates some sort of anniversary at home."

Trant opened a bulky almanac lying on his desk, and as he glanced swiftly down the page his eyes flashed suddenly with comprehension.

"You are correct, I think, as to the influence of the hammering man on her movements," the psychologist said. "But as to her connection with the man

and her reasons, that is another matter. But of that I cannot say till I have had half an hour to myself at the Crerar Library."

"The library, Mr. Trant?" cried young Edwards, in surprise.

"Yes; and, as speed is certainly essential, I hope you still have your motor below."

As young Edwards nodded, the psychologist seized his hat and gloves and his instrument case, and preceded the others from the office. Half an hour later he descended from the library to rejoin the Edwardses waiting in the motor.

"The man who inserted that advertisement—the hammering man, I believe, of whom we are in search," he announced briefly, "is named N. Meyan, and he is lodging, or at least can be addressed at No. 7 Coy Court. The case has suddenly developed far darker and more villainous aspects even than I feared. Please order the chauffeur to go there as rapidly as possible."

Coy Court, at which, twenty minutes later, he bade young Edwards stop the motor, proved to be one of those short, intersecting streets that start from the crowded thoroughfare of Halstead Street, run a squalid block or two east or west, and stop short against the sooty wall of a foundry or machine shop. No. 7, the third house on the left—like many of its neighbors, whose windows bore Greek, Jewish, or Lithuanian signs—was given up in the basement to a store, but the upper floors were plainly devoted to lodgings.

The door was opened by a little girl of eight. "Does N. Meyan live here?" the psychologist asked. "And is he in?" Then, as the child nodded to the first inquiry and shook her head at the second: "When will he be back?"

"He comes to-night again, sure," she said. "Perhaps sooner. But to-night, or to-morrow, he goes away for good. He have paid only till to-morrow."

"I was right, you see, in saying we had need for haste," Trant said to young Edwards. "But there is one thing we can try, even though he is not here. Let me have the picture you showed me this morning!"

He took from Winton's hand the picture of Eva Silber, opened the leather case, and held it so the child could see.

"Do you know that lady?"

"Yes!" The child showed sudden interest. "It is Mr. Meyan's wife."

"His wife!" cried young Edwards.

"So," the psychologist said swiftly to the little girl, "you have seen this lady here?"

"She comes last night." The child had grown suddenly loquacious. "Because she is coming, Mr. Meyan makes trouble that we should get a room ready for her. Already she has sent her things. And we get ready the room next to his. But because she wants still another room, she goes away last night again. Rooms come not so easy here; we have many people. But now we have another, so to-night she is coming again."

"Does it now seem necessary for us to press this investigation further?" Cuthbert Edwards asked caustically. As he spoke, the sound of measured, heavy blows came to them down the dark stair apparently from the second floor of the building. The elder Edwards cried excitedly and triumphantly: "What is that? Listen! That man—Meyan, if it is Meyan—must be here; for that is the same hammering."

"This is even better luck than we could have expected!" exclaimed the psychologist; and he slipped past the child and sped swiftly up the stairs, with his companions closely following. At the head of the flight he passed a stunted woman whose marked resemblance to the little girl below established her at once as mother and landlady, and a trembling old man. With

the elder Edwards, Trant tore open door after door of the rooms upon that floor, and the floor above, before the woman could prevent him. The rooms were all empty.

"Meyan must have escaped!" said Cuthbert Edwards as they returned, crestfallen, to the second story. "But we have proof at least that the child spoke the truth in saying Miss Silber had been here to see him, for she hardly would have allowed her father to come here without her."

"Her father—so this is Miss Silber's father!" Trant swiftly turned to examine with the keenest interest the old man, who shrank back, shivering and shuddering, in a corner. Even in that darkened hall he conveyed to the psychologist an impression of hoary whiteness. His hair and beard were snowy white, the dead pallor of his skin was the unhealthy whiteness of potato shoots that have sprouted in a cellar, and the iris of his eyes had faded until it was almost indistinguishable. Yet there remained something in the man's appearance which told Trant that he was not really old—that he still should be moving, daring, self-confident, a leader among men, instead of cringing and shrinking thus at the slightest move of these chance visitors.

"Meyan? Is it because you are looking for Meyan that you have made all this disturbance?" the woman broke in. "Then why didn't you ask? For now he is at the saloon, I think, only across the street."

"Then we will go there at once," said Trant. "But I will ask you"—he turned to the elder Edwards—"to wait for us at the motor, for two of us will be enough for my purpose, and more than two may defeat it by alarming Meyan."

Trant descended the stairs, took his instrument case from the motor, and with young Edwards crossed the street quickly to the saloon.

CHAPTER III.

THE CLEVER PENCIL.

A DOZEN idlers leaned against the bar or sat in chairs tilted against the wall. Trant examined these idlers one after another closely. The only man at whom he did not seem to look was one who, as the only red-headed man in the place, must plainly be Meyan. "Red-headed" was the only description they had of him, but meager as it was, with the landlady's statement that he was in the saloon, Trant resolved to test him.

The psychologist took an envelope from his pocket and wrote rapidly upon the back of it. "I am going to try something," he whispered, as he flicked the envelope along the bar to Edwards. "It may not succeed, but if I am able to get Meyan into a test, then go into that back room and speak aloud what I have written on the envelope, as if you had just come in with somebody."

Then, as Edwards nodded his comprehension, the psychologist turned easily to the man nearest him at the bar—a pallid Lithuanian sweatshop worker.

"I suppose you can stand a lot of that?" Trant nodded at the glass of pungent whisky. "Still—it has its effect on you. Sends your heart action up—quickeners your pulse."

"What are you?" asked the man, grinning. "Temperance lecturer?"

"Something like that," the psychologist answered. "At least, I can show you the effect whisky has upon your heart."

He picked up the instrument case and opened it. The loungers gathered about him, and Trant saw with satisfaction that they thought him an itinerant temperance advocate. They stared curiously at the instrument he had taken from its case.

"It goes on the arm," he explained. The Lithuanian, with a grin toward his

companions, began to turn up his sleeve. "Not you," Trant said; "you just had a drink."

"Is there a drink in this? I ain't had a drink since breakfast!" said another who pushed up to the table and bared his blue-veined forearm for Trant to fasten the instrument to it.

Young Winton Edwards, watching as curiously as the others, saw Trant fasten the sphygmograph on the mechanic's arm, and the pencil point commence to trace on the sooty surface a wavy line, the normal record of the mechanic's pulse.

"You see it!" Trant pointed out to the others the record, as it unwound slowly from the drum. "Every thought you have, every feeling, every sensation—taste, touch, smell—changes the beating of your heart and shows upon this little record. I could show through that whether you had a secret you were trying to conceal, as readily as I will show the effect whisky has on you, or as I can learn whether this man likes the smell of onion." He took from the free lunch on the bar a slice of onion, which he held under the man's nose. "Ah! You don't like onion! But the whisky will make you forget its smell, I suspect."

As the odor of the whisky reached the man's nostrils, the record line—which when he smelled the onion had become suddenly flattened with elevations nearer together, as the pulse beat weakly but more quickly—began to return to the shape it had had at first. He tossed off the liquor, rolling it upon his tongue, and all saw the record regain its first appearance; then, as the stimulant began to take effect, the pencil point lifted higher at each rise and the elevations became farther apart. They stared and laughed.

"Whisky effects you about normally, I should say." Trant began to unfasten the sphygmograph from the man's wrist. "I have heard it said that black-

haired men, like you, feel its effect least of all; light-haired men more; men with red hair like mine feel the greatest effect, it's said. We red-haired men have to be careful with whisky."

"Hey! There's a red-headed man," one of the crowd cried suddenly, pointing. "Try it on him."

Two enthusiasts at once broke from the group and rushed eagerly to Meyan. He had continued, inattentive through all, to read his newspaper, but now he laid it down. Trant and young Edwards, as he rose and slouched half curiously toward them, could see plainly for the first time his strongly boned, coarsely powerful face, and heavily-lidded eyes, and the grossly muscular strength of his big-framed body.

"Pah! your watered whisky," he jeered in a strangely thick and heavy voice, when the test had been explained to him. "I am used to stronger drinks!"

He grinned derisively at the surrounding faces, kicked a chair up to the table, and sat down. Trant glanced toward Edwards, and Edwards moved silently back from the group and disappeared unnoticed through the partition door. Then the psychologist swiftly adjusted the sphygmograph upon the outstretched arm and watched intently an instant until the pencil point had caught up the strong and even pulse which set it rising and falling in perfect rhythm.

As he turned to the bar for the whisky, the rear door slammed and the voice Trant was expecting spoke: "Yes, it was at Warsaw the police took him. He was taken without warning from his friend's house. What next? The prisons are full, but they keep on filling them; the graveyards will be full next!"

"Look! Look!" cried the Lithuanian beside Trant at the table. "He bragged about watered whisky, but just the sight of it makes his heart beat bigger and stronger!"

Trant bent eagerly over the smoked

paper, watching the stronger, slower pulse beat which the record showed.

"Yes; before he takes the whisky his pulse is strengthened," Trant answered; "for that is how the pulse acts when a man is pleased and exults!"

He waited now, almost inattentively, while Meyan drank the whisky and the others grew silent in defeat as the giant's pulse, true to his boast, showed almost no variation under the fiery liquor.

"Pah, such child foolishness!" Meyan, with steady hand, set the glass back on the table. Then, as Trant unclasped the straps around his arm, he rose, yawned in their faces, and lounged out of the place.

The psychologist turned to meet young Edwards as he hurried in, and together they went out to join the father at the motor.

"We can do nothing sooner than to-night," Trant said shortly, an expression of keen anxiety on his face. "I must learn more about this man, but my inquiries must be conducted alone. If you will meet me here again at seven o'clock to-night, say at the pawnbroker's shop we passed upon the corner, I hope to be able to solve the mystery of the hammering man, and the influence he is undoubtedly exerting on Miss Silber. I may say," he added, after a moment, "that I would not attach too much weight to the child's statement that Miss Silber is Meyan's wife. It is understood, then, that you will meet me here to-night, as I have suggested."

He nodded to his clients, and ran to catch a passing street car.

CHAPTER IV.

WITH NERVES OF STEEL.

PROMPTLY at seven o'clock, in accordance with Trant's directions, young Winton Edwards and his father entered the pawnshop and started negotiations for a loan. Almost immediately

after they arrived there, Trant joined them, still carrying in his hand his instrument case. The boy and his father closed their negotiations and went out with Trant into the street. They saw then, to their surprise, that the psychologist was not alone. Two men were awaiting them, each of whom carried a case like Trant's. The elder of the two, a man between fifty and sixty years old, met young Edwards' stare with a benignant glance of his pale blue eyes through an immense pair of gold spectacles. The other was young, pale, broad-browed, with an intelligent face, and his gaze was fixed in a look of dreamy contemplation. They were dressed as mechanics, but their general appearance was not that of workmen.

The door of Meyan's lodging house was opened to them by the landlady. She led the way to the second floor, but paused to show a room to Trant.

"That is Meyan's room," Trant explained. "We will wait for him over here." He followed the woman into a small and stuffy bedroom on the other side of the hall. "We had better not speak while we are waiting and—we had better wait in the dark."

In the strange, stuffy, darkened little room the five sat in silence. Footsteps passed often in the street outside, and twice some one went through the hall. A half hour they waited thus. Then a heavier footstep warned them of Meyan's coming. A minute later, the front door opened again and admitted—as Trant felt from the effect of the first tone which reached the man waiting at his side—Eva Silber. After several minutes Trant turned up the light and motioned to the two strangers who had come with him. They immediately rose and left the room.

"I am going to submit you both to a very trying ordeal," Trant said to his clients, in a tone so low it could not

reach the hallway, "and it will require great self-control on your part. Within five, or I hope at most ten, minutes I am going to show you into Meyan's room, where you will find, among other persons, Meyan himself and Miss Silber. I want you to promise that neither of you will attempt to question or to speak to Miss Silber until I give you leave. Otherwise I cannot allow you to go in there, and I have my own reasons for wanting you to be present."

"If it is essential, Mr. Trant—" the elder Edwards said.

Trant looked at the young man, who nodded.

"Thank you," said the psychologist; and he went out and closed the door upon them.

Fully a quarter of an hour had passed, in spite of Trant's promise to summon them in ten minutes, before the psychologist again opened the door and ushered them into the room they already knew as Meyan's.

The long table in the center of the room had been cleared, and behind it three men sat in a row. Two of these were the strangers who had come with Trant, and the cases they had carried, together with the one Trant himself had brought, stood open under the table. The man who sat between these two was Meyan. Near the table stood Miss Silber.

At sight of her, Winton Edwards made one swift step forward before he recollected the promise he had made, and checked himself. Eva Silber had grown pale as death. She stood now with small hands clenched tight against her breast, staring into the face of the young American she loved. Trant closed the door and locked it.

"We can begin now, I think," he said.

He stooped at once over the instrument cases and brought out from them three folding screens, about eighteen inches square when extended, which he

set on the table—one in front of each of the three men. At the bottom of each screen was a circular hole just large enough for a man's arm to go through; and at Trant's command the men put their arms through them. Stooping again swiftly over the instrument cases, Trant took out three sphygmographs.

He rapidly adjusted these on the arms of the three men, and set in motion the revolving drums, against which the pencil points traced their wavy lines on smoked paper. His clients, leaning forward in their interest, could then understand the purpose of the screens, which were designed to hide the pitilessly exact records from the three men.

For several minutes Trant allowed the instruments to run quietly, until the men had recovered from the nervousness caused by the beginning of the test.

"I am going to ask Miss Silber to tell you now, as briefly as she can," he said, after a pause, "the circumstances of her father's connection with the Russian revolution which brought him to the state you have seen, and the reasons why she has left you to go with this man to Russia."

"To Russia?" broke from Winton Edwards.

"To Russia, yes!" The girl's pale cheeks glowed. "You have seen my father, what he is, what they have made of him, and you did not know he was a Russian? You have seen him as he is! Let me tell you—you, who wear proudly the badge of your revolution fought in seven short years by your great-grandfathers—what my father was!"

"Before I was born—it was in the year 1887—my father was a student in Moscow. He had married my mother the year before. The czar, finding that even the teachings he had been advised to permit made people dangerous, closed

the universities. Father and his fellow students protested. They were imprisoned; and they kept my father, who had led the protest, so long that I was three years old before he saw his home again!

"But suffering and prison could not frighten him! In Zurich, before he went to Moscow, he had been trained for a doctor. And seeing how powerless the protest of the students had been, he determined to go among the people. So he made himself a medical missionary to the poorest, the most oppressed, the most miserable; and wherever he was called to carry a cure for disease, he carried, too, a word of hope, of courage, of protest, a cry for freedom!"

"Late one night, in a terrible snow-storm," she went on, "just twenty years ago, a peasant brought to our door a note, unsigned for the sake of safety, it seemed, telling father that an escaped political prisoner was dying of exposure and starvation in a hut on a deserted farm ten miles from the town. My father hurried to his horse and set out, with food and fagots, and by morning, through the cold and deep snow, he reached the place.

"There he found a man apparently freezing to death, and fed and warmed him," said the girl; "and when the fellow was able to tell his pitiful tale, father boldly encouraged him, told him of the organization of protest he was forming, and asked him to join. Little by little father told him all he had done and all his plans. At nightfall father said farewell and turned to the door, where he found himself facing a spy, who held a pistol at his head. In the fight that followed, father was able only to wound the other upon the chest with the blunt knife they had used to cut their food, before the spy called a second confederate down from the loft, and father was overcome.

"On the information of these police

spies; without trial of any sort—father's friends could discover only that the name of his betrayer was Valerian Urth—father was sentenced to solitary confinement in an underground cell for life. And my mother—because she sent food and fagots to a supposed convict—was exiled to Siberia! Ten years ago, her sister, who took me, received word that she died on the convict island of Sakhalin; but my father”—she gasped for breath—“lived, at least!”

She stopped as suddenly as she had begun. Trant, who had stooped to watch his records more closely when the name of the police spy was mentioned, still kept his gaze steadfastly upon his instruments. Suddenly he motioned to the girl to complete her narrative.

“Some years ago,” she said, “when I was eighteen, I left my mother's sister and went back to my father's friends, such of them as were still free,” she continued. “Many who had worked with him for the organization had been caught or betrayed. But others and more had come in their places; and they had work for me. I might move about with less suspicion than a man. So I helped prepare for the strikes which at last so terrified the czar that on the thirtieth of October he issued his manifesto to free those in prison. I had helped to free my father, with the rest. I took him to Hungary and left him with friends while I came here. Now, do you not understand why I am going back?” She turned in pitiful appeal to young Edwards. “It is because there is work again in Russia for me to do.”

She checked herself again and turned to Trant to see if he would force her still to proceed. But he was facing intently, as if fascinated, the strange hammering man and his two stranger companions; yet he was not watching their faces or their figures at all. His eyes followed the little pencil points which,

before each of the three, continually traced their lines of record. Then he took quickly from his pocket a folded paper, yellow with age, worn, creased, and pierced with pin marks. In the sight of all he unfolded it swiftly upon the table before the three, refolded it, and put it back into his pocket. And though at sight of it no face changed among the three, even Trant's clients could see how one line now suddenly grew flat, with low elevations, irregular and far apart, as the pencil point seemed almost to stop its motion over the smoked paper of the man in the middle, Meyan.

“That is all,” said Trant, in a tone of assured triumph, as he unstrapped the sphygmographs from their wrists. “You can speak now, Mr. Edwards.”

“Eva!” cried Winton Edwards, in wild appeal. “You are not married to this man?”

“Married? No!” the girl exclaimed in horror. “Until last Thursday, when he came to the office, I never saw him. But he has come to call me for the cause which must be to me higher and holier than love. I must leave my love for the cause of Russia. I must go and nurse our soldiers on the battlefield. I have been promised a full pardon if I will do so.”

Meyan now, with a heavy slouch of his muscular body, left his two companions at the table and moved up beside the girl. “Have any more of you anything to say to her before she goes back with me to Russia?”

“To her? No,” Trant replied. “But to you—and to these gentlemen”—he motioned to the two who had sat at the table with Meyan—“I have to announce the result of my test, for which they are waiting. This elder gentleman is Ivan Munikov, who was forced to leave Russia eight years ago because his pamphlet on ‘Inalienable Rights’ had incurred the displeasure of the police. This younger man is Dmitri Vasili, who

was exiled to Siberia for political offenses at thirteen years of age, but escaped to America. They both are members of the Russian revolutionary organization in Chicago."

"But the test—the test!" cried Vasili.

"The test"—the psychologist turned sternly to face Meyan—"has shown as conclusively and irrefutably as I could hope that this man is not the revolutionist he claims to be, but is, as we suspected might be the case, an agent of the Russian secret police. And not only that! It has shown just as truly, though this fact was at first wholly unsuspected by me, that he—this agent of police who would have betrayed the daughter now and taken her back to Russia to be punished for her share in the previous agitation—is the same agent who, twenty years ago, betrayed the father, Herman Silber, into imprisonment! True name from false I do not know; but this man, who calls himself Meyan now, called himself then Valerian Urth!"

"Valerian Urth!" Eva Silber cried, staggering back into Winton Edwards' arms.

But Meyan made a disdainful gesture with his huge, fat hands. "Bah! You would try to prove such things by your foolish test?"

"Then you will not refuse, of course," Trant demanded sternly, "to show us if there is a knife scar on your chest?"

Even as Meyan would have repeated his denial, Vasili and Munikov leaped from the rear of the room and tore his shirt from his breast. The psychologist rubbed and beat the skin, and the blood rose to the surface, revealing the thin line of an almost invisible and time-effaced scar.

"Our case is proved, I think!" The psychologist turned from the two who stared with hate at the cringing spy, and again faced his clients.

He unlocked the door, and handed

the key to Munikov; then, picking up his instrument cases and record sheets, with Miss Silber and his clients he left the room and entered the landlady's sitting room.

CHAPTER V.

AN INTRUSION OF SCIENCE.

WHEN I received Mr. Edwards' letter this morning," Trant said, in answer to the questions that showered upon him, "it was clear to me at once that the advertisement he inclosed depended for its appeal on reminding Eva Silber of some event of prime importance to herself, but also, from the wording employed, of popular or national significance as well. You further told me that October 30th was a special holiday with Miss Silber. That, I found, to be the date of the czar's manifesto of freedom and declaration of amnesty to political prisoners. At once it flashed upon me: Eva Silber was a Russian. The difference between the seventeenth given in the advertisements and the thirtieth—thirteen days—is just the present difference between the old-style calendar used in Russia and ours.

"Before going to the Crerar Library, then, it was clear that we had to do with a Russian revolutionary intrigue," he went on. "At the library I obtained the key to the cipher and translated the advertisement, obtaining the name of Meyan and his address, and also the name and address of Dmitri Vasili, a well-known revolutionary writer. To my surprise, Vasili knew nothing of any revolutionist named Meyan. It was inconceivable that a revolutionary emissary should come to Chicago and he not know of it. It became necessary to find Meyan immediately.

"My first direct clew was the hammering that we heard in this house. It was too much to suppose that in two separate instances this hammering

should be heard, and in each case Eva's father be present and no other discoverable agent, and that still he should have nothing to do with it. Obviously, it must have been Herman Silber who did the hammering at Eva's home and here in this house. It was obvious, too, that Herman Silber was the 'your own' of the advertisement.

"To test Meyan, whom we found in the saloon, was not difficult," said Trant. "I arranged to have him overhear some one speaking of an arrest at Warsaw, which would at once suggest itself as a hotbed of Russian revolutionists to either a revolutionist or a police agent; but the idea would certainly give positive and very opposite reactions if the man were a true revolutionist or if he were a spy. Meyan's pulse so strengthened and slowed—as under a pleasurable stimulus—that I felt I had received confirmation of my suspicions, though I had not then the information which would enable me to expose the man. To secure this I sought out Dimitri Vasili. He introduced me to Munikov, who had been a friend of Silber before his imprisonment, and between them I got the history of Herman Silber and his daughter.

"I explained to Munikov and Vasili that the methods of the psychological laboratory would be as efficacious in picking out a spy among true men as I have many times proved them to be in convicting the criminal.

"Every emotion reacts upon the pulse, which strengthens in joy and weakens in sorrow, changes with anger and with despair; and as every slightest variation it undergoes can be detected and registered by the sphygmograph—I felt certain that if I could test the three men together by having Miss Silber tell her father's story aloud, I could determine conclusively by comparison of the records of the two true revolutionists with that of Meyan, whether his sym-

pathies were really with the revolutionist party. I arranged with Munikov and Vasili to come here with me tonight, and, after Meyan had arrived, they left us here and went to him as representatives of the revolutionary movement to ask his credentials.

"When he could furnish none," Trant went on, "they proposed, and in fact forced him, into this test. It is a dangerous thing to endeavor to pass oneself off as a revolutionist, and it was safer for him to submit to a test than to have his mission frustrated by incurring not only suspicion, but possibly death. Completely ignorant of the pitiless powers of psychological methods, and confiding in his steely nerves, which undoubtedly have carried him through many less searching ordeals, he agreed. You saw how perfectly he was able to control his face and every movement of his body while the test went on. But you can see here"—Trant spread out his strips of smoked paper—"on these records, which I shall preserve by passing them through a bath of varnish, how useless that self-control was, since the sphygmograph recorded by its moving pencil the hidden feelings of his heart.

"As I lay these side by side, you can see how consistently at each point in the story Munikov and Vasili experienced the same feelings; but Meyan had feelings which were different. I did not dream, of course, when I started the test that I would discover in Meyan the same man who had betrayed Herman Silber. It was only when at her first mention of Valerian Urth I obtained from Meyan this startling and remarkable record," he pointed to a place where the line suddenly had grown almost straight and flat, "that I realized that if the man before me was not himself Urth, he at least had some close and, under the circumstances, oppressive connection with him.

"Eva Silber still had the note that

had been sent to summon her father on the errand of mercy which had caused his imprisonment. She gave it to me before you entered the room. I was certain that of all men in the world there was but one who could recognize or feel any emotion at sight of that yellowed and time-worn paper; and that man was Valerian Urth, who had used it to betray Herman Silber.

"I showed it to Meyan, and obtained this really amazing reaction which ends his record." The psychologist pointed to the record. "It assured me that Meyan and Urth were one."

"This is amazing, Mr. Trant," Cuthbert Edwards said. "But you have left unexplained the most perplexing feature of all—the hammering!"

"To communicate with one another from their solitary cells, Russian prisoners long ago devised a code of spelling letters by knocking upon the wall—a code widely spread and known by every revolutionist. It is extremely simple; the letters of the alphabet"—Trant took from his pocket a slip of paper—"are arranged in this manner."

He set down rapidly the alphabet, omitting two letters, arranged in four lines, thus:

a	b	c	d	e	f
g	h	i	k	l	m
n	o	p	r	s	t
u	v	w	x	y	z

"A letter is made," the psychologist explained, "but giving first the proper number of knocks for the line, a short pause, then knocks for the number of the letter in the line. For instance, *e* is one knock and then five; *y* is four knocks and then five.

"By means of this code I translated the figures in the advertisement and obtained Meyan's name and address. I suppose he used it not only in the advertisement, but at the office, because his long experience had taught him that Herman Silber, as many another man condemned to the horrors of a

Russian prison for a term of years, had probably lost the power of speech, and continued to communicate, in freedom, by the means he had used for so many years in prison."

"Wonderful, Mr. Trant, wonderful!" exclaimed Cuthbert Edwards. "I only regret that we can do nothing to Meyan; for there is no law, I think, by which he can be punished."

The psychologist's face darkened. "Vengeance is not ours," he answered simply. "But I have given the key of Meyan's room to Munikov!"

The elder Edwards, clearing his throat, moved over to Eva and put his arm about her as though to protect her. "Since you must see that you cannot go back to Russia, my dear," he said awkwardly, "will you not let me welcome you now into your place in my home?"

And as the son sprang swiftly forward and caught his father's hand, Trant took up his instrument cases under his arm, and went out alone into the warm April night.

Long Enough

A MAN came into a dog show one day leading a most disreputable dog by a length of rope.

"Where's the judge?" he demanded.

"What do you want the judge for?" asked an attendant.

"Want to show my dog," said the man.

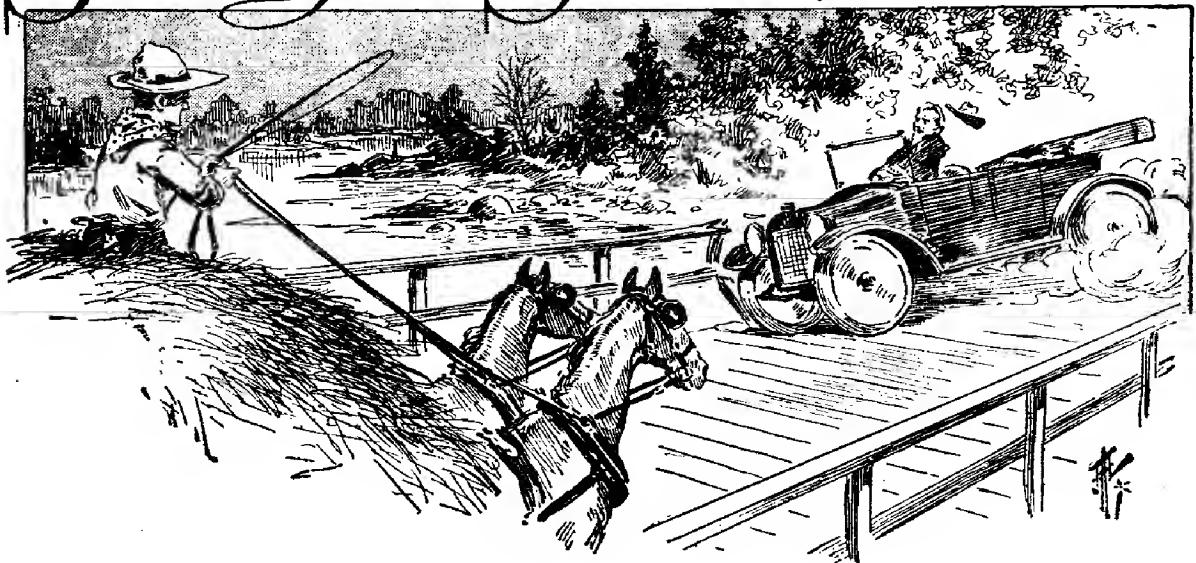
"Show that?" queried the other. "Why, you surely don't think that weird object has any chance of taking a prize?"

"Why not?" demanded the offended owner.

"Oh, well," said the attendant, "his legs are enough, without anything else. Why, man, they're miles too short!"

"Too short!" retorted the dog's owner fiercely. "Too short? What more do you want? They touch the ground, don't they?"

Shaming the Speed Limit - Burt L. Standish



(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

A GIRL, A DOG, AND A MAN.

WHEN Miss Elizabeth Wiggin settled herself comfortably in the shade of the spreading oak in Libby's pasture, she looked forward eagerly to a pleasant and quiet hour with her book, "Wooed, Won, and Wedded." As may be surmised from the title of the book, Miss Wiggin was romantic. She was likewise just eighteen years of age, and the daughter of Judge Nathan P. Wiggin, of Greenbush, the village that could be seen nestling in the valley something like a mile distant from that hillside oak.

Miss Wiggin lived in Greenbush, but on pleasant afternoons she had a habit of wandering away, accompanied only by an aged shepherd dog, in search of some spot where she could read without fear of interruption. For her grim old father objected to trashy love stories, and her ascetic spinster aunt, who had acted as the judge's housekeeper

since the death of Mrs. Wiggin, held all such fiction in abhorrence.

Indeed, the animus of Aunt Sally Wiggin against stories depicting the ravages wrought by the little god of the bow and arrow was so extreme that, by consigning such terrible tales to the flames whenever she found them about the house, she conscientiously did her best to prevent them from turning the head of her niece. She even forbade the village news dealer to sell Bessie any more books of that type.

In these days, however, it is no easy matter to deprive any one of the mental pabulum that is desired, and Aunt Sally had set herself a task that she could not accomplish. Lemuel Dodd, Judge Wiggin's hostler and man of all work, red-headed, freckled, and homely as a stump fence, undeterred by the discouraging fact that his persistent efforts to make love to Bessie seemed merely to arouse her amusement, became her secret and faithful ally. Twice a week, at least, he spent twenty-five cents of his wages for a paper-covered novel to be smuggled

into her possession, and invariably he chose the ones whose titles seemed to promise that their contents would come up to Elizabeth's requirements.

"There ain't many single fellers left round this town," Lemuel told himself, "and mebbe if she reads enough of them yarns she'll git so desprit she'll have to grab what's handy. And when she gits the notion to grab, I'm going to take keer that I'm the handiest thing in reach."

And so, on this sunny September afternoon, Bessie Wiggin was seeking the shade of the oak in Libby's pasture, presumably afar from interruption, and prepared thoroughly to enjoy Lemuel's latest contribution. Her face was almost hidden by one of Aunt Sally's extremely old-fashioned sunbonnets, which she had hastily taken when she slipped out of the house with the book. Shep, the old dog, stretched himself in the short grass at her feet and prepared to go to sleep comfortably.

The view from this spot, at a considerable distance from the brown road that wound, ribbonlike, down into the village, was pleasant to the eye, but the judge's daughter lost no time in admiring the scenery. She was soon absorbed in the pages of her novel.

So absorbed did she become that she failed to hear the approaching steps of a somewhat dusty and soiled, but decidedly good-looking, young man in a brown Norfolk suit, knee-length leather leggings, and a motoring cap. He was within a few yards of her when he saw her and stopped.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he said, looking down upon the obscuring sunbonnet.

She uttered a little startled scream, and looked up, her blue eyes wide, her red lips parted. A glimpse of the pretty and youthful face which the sunbonnet had concealed caused the stranger to catch his breath.

"Reginald!" exclaimed Miss Wiggin,

beholding before her the living incarnation of the hero of her book just as her fancy had pictured him.

"Daphne!" said the young man, thinking of the mythological wood nymph.

"Woof!" barked the old dog, awaking and springing up as quickly as age and rheumatism would allow.

The stranger backed round to the opposite side of the tree. "Keep that beast away from me, please," he begged, in evident apprehension.

With a swift sweep of one slender hand, Miss Wiggin thrust back the sunbonnet, which, held by the loosely knotted ribbons, hung suspended on her shoulders, exposing a mass of wavy, golden-brown hair. At the same moment, with remarkable agility and grace, she half rose and half turned. On her knees, her right hand clasping the book, the fingers of her left hand lightly touching the ground, her gaze followed the shrinking young man, who was now fearfully watching the ominously growling dog. Surely this was unexpected and disappointing behavior for Reginald, the brave, who—in her novel—had unhesitatingly faced the most frightful perils for his lady fair.

Made suspicious by the actions of the stranger, Shep advanced, bristling and snapping. As if contemplating instant flight, the young man gave one hasty look around. The nearest fence was some six or eight rods away, and it did not promise to stop a ferocious and angry dog in pursuit of a fleeing fugitive, and there was no other refuge in sight.

"Keep that creature away, won't you?" again entreated the agitated man, placing the trunk of the tree between himself and the animal. "I detest dogs!"

"Oh, Reginald!" sighed Bessie Wiggin, in bitter disappointment.

"Oh, hang it!" exploded the stranger, with shocking violence. "If I had a gun——"

Shep charged, barking violently. He meant to stop out of reach of the man's feet in case he showed a disposition to kick. But, making a great leap, the stranger clutched a stout lower limb of the tree, and swung himself up out of the reach of harm with the most amazing celerity, the dog snapping at his heels as they receded skyward.

Perched astride the limb, with his feet drawn up, the refugee shook his fist at the raging animal, which, inflamed by success, made another great jump into the air and fell back on the ground, his age-enfeebled legs collapsing beneath him.

Still kneeling, the girl burst into a peal of laughter.

CHAPTER II.

ROMANCE JUSTIFIED.

GO to it!" said the exasperated man in the tree. "Get in your laugh while the laughing's good. If your confounded dog had succeeded in chewing some chunks out of me, I suppose you'd simply have collapsed with merriment."

"Oh, dear!" gasped Miss Wiggin, trying to suppress her mirth. "If you only realized how ridiculous it is! Old Shep couldn't hurt a sick kitten."

"Huh!" grunted the stranger skeptically. "Perhaps not, but he certainly showed a strong desire to plant a few teeth in any part of my person that he could reach."

Miss Wiggin continued to laugh. "It would have to be a *few* teeth, as he's lost almost all that he ever had, and he's so old that he's half deaf and getting blind. That's why he didn't warn me that you were coming. If you hadn't shown that you were scared, he'd never have made an offer to touch you."

"How was I to know that?" demanded the man on the limb, flushing. "On such short notice I couldn't tell whether he was a senile and harmless

old dog or a young and savage one bent on making a meal off my person."

"You're an awful coward, aren't you?" asked the girl, rising to her feet and regarding him with open contempt.

She was slender, willowy, and graceful. He considered that she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen, and he wondered how, even with the sunbonnet hiding her face, he had made the blunder of mistaking her for a middle-aged woman. He felt his heart thumping queerly. He also felt his face burning beneath her unmasked disdain.

"Let me explain," he pleaded hastily.

"It isn't necessary," she cut him short. "I don't suppose there are any Reginalds to be found outside the pages of fiction."

"The Daphnes," he returned, "are myths."

She tossed her head. "Besides being a 'fraid cat,' she retorted, "you're just about the most impolite person I ever met. What were you doing prowling around in this field, anyhow?"

"Being in haste to secure a conveyance to Albion for two gentlemen whose motor has broken down back yonder on the road, I was making a short cut to town and avoiding the most of the hill. The gentlemen must catch the three-forty train at Albion. It is now," he stated, balancing himself on the limb and taking out his watch, "seven minutes past two."

"And twenty-three miles to Albion. Your gentlemen will have to hurry."

"They may make it if I can get an automobile in town."

Again she laughed. "Automobiles aren't popular in Greenbush. Peter Beedy is the only citizen who owns one. He's been arrested and fined four times for exceeding the speed limit of eight miles an hour. The last time that happened he was so mad he swore he'd never start the machine again, and he had it towed to his barn and stored away."

"Thanks for the information. Me for Peter Beedy." He glanced downward. Sitting on his haunches and gazing upward with a wistful eye, Shep was licking his old chops. "If you will be good enough to call your dog away and keep a firm, restraining hand upon him, I'll hit the high spots between here and Mr. Beedy's domicile."

"As long as you're so completely lacking in sand," said she, "I'll collar Shep and hold him until you get a fair start. But let me warn you that if you succeed in getting Beedy's auto you'll certainly be pinched and fined if you're caught driving faster than eight miles an hour anywhere within the town limits."

"It's always necessary," was his retort, "first to catch your hare. If Beedy's bubble has any speed at all, somebody will be handed a laugh. When you give the word, I'll come down."

Now it chanced that neither of them had noticed the approach of Libby's bull, confined in that same pasture. The bull was ugly, and resentful of intrusion on its domain. And just as the girl placed one hand on the dog's collar the bull charged, with a snort and a bellow. The man on the limb shouted a warning. The girl screamed and dodged behind the tree. The dog, seeing the charging beast by accident, bounded lamely to meet him. And the bull, with one sweep of his horns, tossed the dog fifteen feet into the air.

The man in the tree was paralyzed with horror. The disastrous attempt of the dog to protect his mistress seemed to check the charging bull for barely a fraction of a second. With glaring eyes, the beast came on, dashing straight at the terrified girl.

"The fence!" shouted the man. "Run!"

Even as he uttered the words he realized what would happen if she attempted to obey. The infuriated beast would overtake her, toss her with its horns even as the old dog had been

tossed, gore her, trample the life out of her delicate body. For the briefest fraction of time, he was sickened by the thought. Then he dropped from the tree directly in the path of the mad creature. As he dropped, he snatched the cap from his head. The instant his toes touched the turf, he sprang to one side. The bull missed him by a foot, and he struck the animal across the eyes with his cap.

It seemed like a feeble thing to do, but he had time for nothing else, and he hoped desperately to turn the attention of the beast from the girl; hoped somehow, by diverting the creature's fury to himself, to give her an opportunity to flee to safety beyond the fence.

The girl had circled round the tree, keeping it between herself and the bull. As the man struck the animal, the latter swerved and turned with amazing speed, surprised, perhaps, by the appearance of a second human being on the scene. The stranger waved his arms and shouted challengingly. The animal accepted the challenge promptly and charged at him.

"Oh!" gasped Miss Wiggin. "He'll be—killed!"

But, almost with the agility of a capeador, the young man again leaped aside at precisely the right moment to foil the beast. Again he struck with his cap, but this time it was impaled on one of the bull's horns and torn from his hand.

Without glancing round at the girl, he cried sharply, commandingly: "Run for the fence! I'll keep him busy till you are safe."

Bessie Wiggin ran, just as she was ordered to do, although she did not realize what she was doing until she had almost reached the fence. Too terrified to look back, she actually sailed over the barrier almost as a frightened deer might have done, scarcely touching the top rail, falling safe on the far side amid some boulders and bushes, where

for a moment she lay panting and helpless.

She was aroused by Shep. The faithful old dog had not been killed. Limping and whining, he had followed her in her flight and dragged himself through the fence. Still whining plaintively, he was licking her face.

With a sobbing cry, she seized the fence and pulled herself to her feet. Still baiting the bull, the young man was dodging round and round the tree, the enraged beast making every effort to reach him. He had kept his word; he had held the attention of the animal while she escaped; the handsome stranger she had called a coward had taken this dreadful risk for her.

Realizing the danger he was in, she called to him wildly: "Oh, look out—look out! Jump—quick! Run! Do something!"

He certainly was doing something; in fact, he was an extremely busy person just then. Again and again he appeared to avoid the rushes of the bull barely by a hair's breadth. Each time this happened the girl's heart seemed ready to burst with terror. It could not last long. The snorting, bellowing beast would get him at last. A slight miscalculation, the slightest slip, and it would all be over.

Bessie Wiggin grasped a stake of the fence, and tried desperately to tear it loose, intending to return to the assistance of the stranger with this weapon. She was the coward, after all! She had run away and left him to be killed!

Then she saw him "put over" a bit of strategy on the bull. The animal had paused for a moment, and turned slowly upon him, pawing the ground. Instead of placing the tree between himself and danger, the man planted his back against it, his eyes never leaving the beast for an instant.

Waving his hands in gestures of disdain, he taunted the creature. "Come on, old lumberheels! Wake up and

show a little pep! Throw into high gear and give us some speed. Don't quit now; the fun's just begun. Wake up! Come on!"

The bull leaped forward like a hurricane. And just as the pale and horrified girl expected to see the man impaled to the tree, he slipped deftly behind it. The head of the bull crashed against the oak, and the animal staggered as if struck by a butcher's maul.

The stranger laughed. "That ought to give you a slight headache," he said.

"Run!" cried the girl. "This way—quick! Now's the time!"

Dazed, the bull was backing off slowly, shaking his head. Evidently the man agreed with Bessie that the moment was propitious, for he turned and raced toward the fence. But the animal had not been injured nearly as much as one might have supposed, and, seeing his mocking foe in flight, he plunged in pursuit.

The stranger was fleet-footed, but the bull was a trifle fleeter. Just as the runner gathered himself to take the fence with one clean leap, the beast overtook him. Through the air sailed the man, propelled by the head and horns of the bull, as well as by the spring of his own legs. Over the fence in a great curve he came, crashing head downward amid the rocks and bushes.

When the young man opened his eyes again, he discovered that his head was resting in the lap of Miss Bessie Wiggin, who, sobbing hysterically, was wiping his forehead with a bloodstained handkerchief.

He looked up at her and smiled. "Daphne!" he whispered.

"Reginald!" she cried.

CHAPTER III.

IT NEVER RAN SMOOTH.

YOU'RE not killed, are you?" she sobbed, trying to stanch the flow of blood that trickled from a gash at the edge of his hair near his temple.

"If I am," he returned, with a feeble effort to jest, "I don't know it yet."

"But you're hurt. You struck on your head."

"Probably that saved my life. Solid ivory, you know. I will admit that I feel a trifle upset, so to speak. No, don't move—please don't! The mere thought of your moving gives me pain."

"But I must go for help. You're wounded."

"I am," he admitted, gazing up into her blue eyes in a manner that gave her a most peculiar sensation. "Mortally wounded, I fear. I never was hit so hard in my life, and I am afraid I can't recover."

Again she cried out in apprehension and distress. "Oh, I was afraid you were done for when that beast caught you!"

"I am," was his singularly cheerful acknowledgment; "I'm done for. I've got mine. The jig is up with me."

"Is it your arms, your legs? Your ribs—are they smashed? Where do you feel it most?"

"Here," he answered, putting his hand to his heart. "But it isn't my ribs; it's something deeper, Daphne."

"That isn't my name; it's Bessie."

"Bessie! Mine's George. Awfully commonplace, isn't it? Now, if my folks had only called me Reginald——"

"You mustn't try to talk. I'm sure it's painful. You must keep still."

"I will if you'll keep on talking yourself. The sound of your voice soothes me like the murmuring of a brook. Your eyes are like springtime violets. The touch of your little hand is as delicious as a draft of pure water to a person dying of thirst. Now I'll leave it to you if a Reginald could beat that speech much."

She stiffened and drew back a bit, the color beginning to return to her pale cheeks. They looked at each other steadily, and the returning flush covered her face.

Beyond the fence the victorious bull pawed the ground; from a vantage of safety the old dog glared through the rails and regarded the bull with disapproval, but the man and girl paid no attention to either of them. The girl had turned her gaze toward the distant road that wound down into the village.

"I don't believe you are hurt much," she said, in a low voice, which, however, was made unsteady by a queer little throbbing in her throat. "If you were, you couldn't talk like that."

"It's because I am that I can talk like that," he declared. "It's the first time I ever talked that way to any one."

"Your friends who have to get to Albion," she murmured; "I'm afraid they'll lose their train."

"By Jove!" he cried, sitting up suddenly. "I'd clean forgotten them!"

"You were fooling me!" she exclaimed, as she started to rise.

With a groan he fell back. The crimson, oozing from his wound, ran down across his temple, and in another moment she was again checking the flow with her handkerchief. His eyes were closed, and she imagined he had fainted.

"Oh, dear!" She seemed distraught. "I don't know what to do! I've got to get help, but if I leave you, you may bleed to death."

"Don't let me bleed to death," he begged faintly. "Don't leave me—Bessie. You mustn't leave me—as long as I live."

It seemed a great effort for him to lift his eyelids, but he looked at her again, and the appeal in his eyes filled her with a feeling of desperation.

"You must have a doctor."

"You're the only doctor I want. You're the only doctor who can cure me. If you throw up the case and turn me over to a common pill slinger, I'll never get over it."

"But I've simply got to get help for you somehow. I'll hurry."

"I can't let you go. I'm an awful coward, you know, and——"

"You're nothing of the sort! I've never seen anybody as brave as you are."

A tremor ran over his body. At first she thought it was a convulsive movement of pain, but when it continued she was overcome by the astounding conviction that he was laughing. Astonishment gave place to outraged indignation. There was no mistaking the fact that he was really shaking with laughter that he sought in vain to suppress. She leaped up, letting him drop back, and stood rigid, filled with intense resentment.

"You—you're making sport of me!" she said, in a low voice that suddenly had in it something like icy brittleness. "You've been playing on my sympathy! You're not really hurt—much. It was a very gentlemanly thing to do! I hope you have enjoyed yourself!"

He sat up without much effort. "I give you my word of honor that I didn't mean to laugh at you. Perhaps my head is affected a little. This crack on the bean must be the cause. It really was some bump."

"You—you wretch!" she cried, stamping her foot. "I hate you!"

Her little hands were tightly clenched. She turned away to hide the tears which welled again into her eyes; but now they were tears of exasperation, shame, and rage.

He got quickly to his feet. "Please, Bessie!" he said. "You don't understand. Not for the world would I——"

He stopped short, staring across at the road, down which a touring car containing two men was speeding toward the village.

"Great Cæsar!" he cried. "There goes the governor! Hitchens must have got the engine running somehow. They'll expect to find me in town."

With all the strength of a good pair of lungs, he shouted, waving his hands above his head. The automobile sped

on. Its occupants neither saw nor heard him.

"I guess I'm left for the time being," he said. "They'll go ripping straight through to catch that train at Albion."

"They won't rip through very far," Miss Wiggin flung at him. "There's a trap just outside the village, watched by a deputy sheriff and two constables. Your old governor will be nabbed and pulled up before my father, who will soak him with a fine. And I hope dad soaks him good," she finished, laughing, and doing so with a vindictiveness that seemed to afford her untold relief and satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAPPERS.

JEREMIAH SMALL, constable of the town of Greenbush, sat on the top rail of the roadside fence and wedged a load of fine cut into the bowl of a burned, blackened, odorous corncob pipe, packing it down with a decidedly dirty thumb. From his perch he could look over the top of a cluster of low sumacs and keep watch upon a point on the hillside where the highway wound into view. He could also see, somewhat nearer, a tall and lonely elm tree, past which the road ran in a broadside curve.

"Weeping" Buzzell, another constable, was sitting on the ground in the shade of the sumacs, leaning against the fence, and occasionally wiping his red-rimmed and watery eyes with a faded and mussed bandanna handkerchief. His jaws worked wearily at a quid of tobacco, the presence of which was further advertised by the unmistakable stains at the corners of his doleful and flabby mouth. He had chosen his lowly position for comfort, and because his companion was far better adapted to the task of outlook.

"I tell you, 'Miah," sniffed Buzzell, "this here job is jest about played out.

A dollar-sixty a day ain't no livin' pay for a hard-workin' man, and that's all we git outside commissions on the fines the jedge imposes, and the deputy sheruff gits the biggest whack at them. We have to be pacified with what comes outer the little end o' the horn. Yistidday my share was thutty-two cents, and so fur to-day we ain't nabbed only one motor-cycle feller who come through by accident, havin' got off the road to Damascus. I'm gittin' discouraged."

Constable Small made a final poke at the pipe bowl, and glanced down at the complaining individual. "Never knowed you to tackle any job that you didn't git discouraged over in a short time, Silas," he averred contemptuously. "Gittin' discouraged is your long suit. You've been discouraged all your life."

Buzzell moved his slouching shoulders resentfully. "Mebbe that's so, 'Miah, but I ain't never had no luck, like some folks. When I was swore in as constable and put on this job, there was an av'rage of eighteen or twenty merchines a day that went through town regardless of speed regerlations. Business was lively, and I sorter guessed my luck had turned. But now them there automobile fellers has got wise and sent out warnin's and posted notices in all the garraiges round about cautionin' folks to keep away from Greenbush, and they're goin' round by the way of Damascus or Cherryfield, and leavin' us to twiddle our thumbs. My opinion, it's hurt the town, too; Greenbush is deader'n a salted herrin'."

Small lifted a broganned foot and struck a match on the leg of his trousers, after which he held it up until his wheezing pipe was lit.

"Better not go makin' that kind of talk in the hearin' of Jedge Wiggin," he warned, pulling hard at the rebellious corncob. "If you done so, he'd tell you what in a hurry, and you'd lose your badge so quick it'd make your head

swim. You know him, Silas. He ain't got no use for automobiles nohow, and when he announced that he perposed to enforce the speed regerlations without fear or favor, he sartainly meant it. He'd slap a fine onto the President of the United States if he was to go scootin' through town faster'n the speed limit allows."

"Mebbe he would," said Buzzell. "He's so hard-headed and sot it would be just like him. Jest because he's alwus been a hoss owner and a hossman, he's down on automobiles in gen'r'al and ev'rybody that has anything to do with 'em. I reckon that's why he wants to be representative to the legis-latoor, he wants to go there to put through some kind of a bill to restrict the use of them merchines to certain roads so that the drivers of hosses can have the other roads to themselves. That's jest how old-fashioned the jedge is."

"Lemme tell you somethin', Silas," said Constable Small, taking his pipe from between his teeth and striking an impressive attitude with it. "They better let him go. If the jedge don't git the nomination from this deestrict, he'll upset their apple cart as sure as preachin'. There'll be three candidates in the primaries, and the party don't want Rufe Crockett, for he's a windbag, a turncoat, and a flopper, and he'd be beat at the polls, just as he was four year ago on the ticket of t'other party. But if Jedge Wiggin can't win, I'll bet you a twenty-cent plug of War Hoss he turns his strength ag'inst Ephraim Glover, of Palmyra, and throws the nomination to Crockett. This deestrict is the keystone, and if the party loses it, they'll most likely lose the whole county. I understand the governor himself is ruther fretted over the situation, with the primaries comin' on next week."

"I don't keer much about politics nohow," declared Buzzell, wiping his eyes again. "One party's bad as t'other.

and there ain't neither of 'em done nothing for me. Still I s'pose I'm expected to vote for the jedge jest because I happened to be the most capable man they could find for this job. Nobody else I know of wanted it. I took it because it promised to be a purty good thing, not because I'm partic'ler agin' automobilists. I'm goin' to tell you my private idee: I think Nathan Wiggin's turned Greenbush into a graveyard by finin' ev'rybody ketched goin' faster'n eight miles in the town limits. He's give the place a black eye and set people to dodgin' it. He ain't progressive, that's all I got to say."

"And if you've got any sense left in your noodle you won't go round kow-wowning that kind of talk. If you did — Hey! By gowdy! Here comes a bubble over the hill! Git up! Git out your ticker and ketch him when he passes the big elum. He's hittin' it up like a streak of greased quicksilver."

There was immediate action in the shade of the sumacs. With a sniffling grunt, which held something both of protest and eagerness, Weeping Buzzell heaved himself to his feet, fishing for his watch. On the fence Jeremiah Small already had his timepiece in hand. His snaggy teeth gripped the pipestem; his leathery face expressed the rapacity of the still hunter who has sighted game.

"Ready, now!" he cried. "Ketch him when I give the word. Now!"

Down the winding road shot the automobile, trailing a cloud of dust behind it. Besides the driver, a smooth-faced, bespectacled man of thirty, it contained only one person, a stout, florid, worried-looking individual in the middle years of life.

"Careful, Hitchens!" warned the latter, as the man at the wheel made a turn that barely prevented them from taking to the ditch. "You know you're not used to driving. Don't pile us up."

"Don't worry, sir," returned the driver reassuringly. "You know you've

got to catch that train if you're going to get to your office for the conference with the chairman of the State committee. You'll have to talk with old Wiggin over the phone. No time to stop in Greenbush and chin with him now."

"We've got to pick up the boy in town. He must have got there twenty minutes ago. We're liable to meet him starting out after me with a hired car. Keep your eyes peeled."

Around another curve careened the car, and struck the straight, gentle incline running down into the village. Out from behind the sumacs dashed the constables, Jeremiah Small planting himself in the very center of the highway, one hand upflung authoritatively while the other flipped back his coat and revealed the badge pinned to his left suspender. Silas Buzzell backed him up, but with a shade more discretion about blocking the path of the speeding motor car.

"Stop!" shouted Constable Small. "In the name of the law I command you!"

"Hold up!" wheezed Constable Buzzell. "Stop right where ye be!"

"Pinched!" exclaimed the driver, in disgust and consternation.

"Don't stop! Go on!" rasped the florid-faced man at his side. Then he lifted himself above the glass wind shield, flung up his gloved hands, and roared: "Clear the road, you idiots! Out of the way! Get out!"

Seeing the automobile whizzing straight at him without slackening speed to any perceptible degree, Jeremiah Small cast his dignity to the winds and made a leap for safety. Weeping Buzzell backed off the shoulder of the road, caught his heel, and sat down amid the dusty grass of the shallow ditch. The car swished past, the stout man relaxing on the seat, and tore on its way.

"That'll cost ye ten dollars more for defyin' the majesty of the law!" splut-

tered Small, shutting his eyes to prevent them from being filled with the blinding cloud of dust flung over both officers. "The jedge alwus tucks on an additional ten for that trick. Go it, you gay birds! The faster you drive, the higher you'll bounce when you hit the bumps. Come on, Silas! Deputy Newberry'll have that gay pair collared in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

If the defiant autoists fancied they were to escape the clutches of the speed regulators in that easy manner, they soon realized their error. Farther on toward the village, running the full width of the road, were a series of artfully arranged ridges and hollows calculated to give a severe shaking up to the passengers of any motor car proceeding at a speed exceeding four or five miles an hour.

When this particular car struck those speed-killers, the two occupants were shot into the air with great violence. Coming down, the car seemed to meet them coming up, and the second and third bounces were worse than the first. Indeed, it was little short of remarkable that the florid-faced passenger succeeded in staying in the car at all. The driver, clinging desperately to the wheel, had a better chance, although he found it extremely difficult. And ahead of them the road undulated for a distance of several rods, like miniature waves of the sea.

"Ugh! Woogh! Woosh!" spluttered the older man, clutching wildly at the bucking car. "What—in—Halifax! Shut her—unk!—down, Hitchens! Stop her!"

Hitchens struggled to obey, finally succeeding in throwing the clutch and jamming on the brake. The wheels, locked, slid with a grinding sound that meant money in the pocket of some tire manufacturer, the car bobbed and hobbled over the ragged places, and the pursuing cloud of dust swooped down over them. When the dust settled a

little and they could catch their breath again, they beheld a formidable, satisfied-looking man calmly mounting the right-hand running board.

"I'm the deputy sheruff of this town," announced the individual who had boarded them. "And you are took up for breaking the speed limit and defyin' two regler authorized officers of the law."

CHAPTER V.

DISPENSING JUSTICE.

THE driver bristled with indignation.

"It's an outrage!" he cried. "We must get to Albion in time to catch the three-forty train. You can't stop us."

"I've stopped ye already," said Deputy Sheriff Newberry serenely. "Under the circumstances it don't become you to tell me what I can't do. You'll be permitted to proceed on your way to Albion after Jedge Wiggin attends to your case. So you might as well soople down and take it calm."

"But you don't understand, you don't know who you're holding up in this high-handed fashion. You are interfering with—"

"Wait, Hitchens!" cut in the other man, giving a glance at his watch. "Never mind telling him who we are."

"Tain't necessary," stated Newberry. "You'll have to tell the jedge, anyhow."

"How long," asked the man with the watch, "will it require to get through with this business so that we may go on. It is most important that we should get that train."

"Wull," drawled the deputy, "if the jedge is around handy, and he don't read you too long a lecture before he slaps on the fine, mebbe you'll git started ag'in in half or three-quarters of an hour; 'tain't likely to be more'n an hour, anyhow."

"Half an hour will make us miss the train. Can't we fix it with you?"

"Now take keer, take keer! Don't you go for to offer no bribes to an officer of the law. I couldn't take them nohow," he added as Constable Small came hurrying up with Constable Buzzell wheezing and sniffling at his heels.

"But," protested Hitchens, "if you knew who——"

"Never mind that," interrupted the older man sharply. "The other business will have to wait. I have a curiosity to see just how Judge Wiggin handles cases of this sort."

"Your cur'osity," assured Deputy Sheriff Newberry, swinging open the tonneau door, "will be satisfied. Git in, boys!"

When the three men had all piled into the rear of the car the one in command directed Hitchens to drive straight down the long main street of the town, and proceeded slowly.

Their appearance in the village was the signal for various inhabitants who observed them to grin and wag their heads, making uncomplimentary and derisive remarks, while a number of small boys, hooting and laughing, assembled and followed the car as far as Turner's grocery, over which, in a bare and sparsely furnished room, Judge Wiggin dispensed justice by mulcting the unfortunate speeders who were arraigned before him. A number of idle citizens, who had been gossiping and swapping stories on the store steps, rose at once and followed the prisoners, conducted by Newberry and Buzzell, up the narrow back stairs to the "court-room." Jeremiah Small had been sent to fetch the judge.

The automobilists were given chairs facing a table which served as a desk, and an anæmic-looking young man in horn-rimmed spectacles seated himself at the table and began making out the complaint, having first questioned Buzzell about the speed which the offenders

had been making when they ran into the trap.

"Your name?" inquired the clerk, turning to the older man.

"Put down John Doe," said the latter, "and Richard Roe," he added, nodding toward his companion. "I am the owner of the car. Richard was driving when we were held up."

The younger man gave him a queer look, and leaned closer, whispering something behind his hand. The answer was a grim smile and a shake of the head. After slight hesitation, the clerk wrote down the names as given.

The sound of heavy steps on the stairs preceded the entrance of Constable Small, who announced that the judge was out somewhere, but that Willie Baker and Nubby Snell had been sent scouting to find him.

"I never heard of such an outrage!" exploded the intensely annoyed Hitchens. "Somebody is going to regret this imposition. Time is valuable to us, and——"

"Don't git flustered and fly off the handle, mister," advised Deputy Newberry, twisting off a quid of War Horse with his teeth and stowing it, bulging, into his cheek with a tongue made dexterous by long practice. "It won't joggle things along no faster, and I cal'late you'll be the one to do the regrettin' if you go shootin' off a lot of loose talk. If you git sassy before the jedge, I warn ye now that it'll prob'ly land ye in the caboose. 'Go slow' is a motter it's best to foller around here."

"Why don't you tell them something?" persisted Hitchens, again appealing to his companion.

"What talking I decide to do will be done to the judge himself," said the older man.

In the course of fifteen minutes Judge Wiggin appeared. He was a lean and wiry man with a somewhat grim jaw and a steely blue eye. There was dignity in his manner. He scarcely

glanced at the prisoners as he seated himself at the table opposite the clerk and adjusted his spectacles to read the complaint.

"Hats off!" he ordered, rapping with his knuckles. "John Doe and Richard Roe, by the complaint of a deputy sheriff and two constables, by the town of Greenbush duly and legally authorized, you are hereby charged with catawamping a hossless vehicle over a public highway, lying within the town limits, at a speed of forty miles an hour, thereby rupturing the law made and provided, and wantonly and willfully endangering the peace and safety of other persons who might find it necessary to locomote upon said highway.

"According to the complaint," the judge continued, "the before-mentioned Richard Roe was the driver, and the before-mentioned John Doe the owner, of said hossless vehicle at the time of the infraction of said law. That being the fact, the penalty administered, in case the charge is admitted or proven, will be applied in full to the person who was engaged in piloting the juggernaut when you was nabbed. And let me add that in this court, with the exception of the judge presiding, unnecessary talk is a luxury, and luxuries add to the high cost of living. A word to the wise is a seed sown upon good ground that springeth up and beareth the fruit of economy. Richard Roe, guilty or not guilty?"

Biting his lip with annoyance, the younger of the two prisoners started to protest: "It was necessary—er—your honor, that we should catch the westward-bound train at Albion. If you were aware who we are, who your petty officers, hiding like highwaymen in ambush, had ventured to hold up—"

Again Judge Wiggin's knuckles smote the desk. "Apparently," he said, "my observation regarding the expense of unnecessary talk in this court failed to sink in, or even to make a dent. No

excuse of private necessity condones infractions of the law. Your careless remark, as well as the suspicious nature of the names you have given, leads me to believe that you are pirooting around the country under false colors, and makes it rather probable that you are old offenders trying in that way to dodge the extreme penalty the court might see fit to administer if your real identities was known. I shall bear this in mind in passing sentence."

The grinning spectators tittered guardedly. The older man reached out and placed a hand on his companion's knee.

"You can see that you are simply making matters worse," he whispered. "Anything you may say will be used against us. Plead guilty at once."

Squirming and rebellions, Hitchens complied. However, instead of passing sentence without delay, the judge squared away on his chair, locked the fingers of his hands before him, and proceeded to read the culprits a lengthy lecture anent the rights of the common people upon the highways and the outrageous and criminal manner in which these rights were disregarded by automobilists in general.

During this scathing harangue he scarcely looked at either of the impatient and suffering victims, but kept his gaze fixed, for the most part, on the rafters above their heads. He was the possessor of a fluent flow of language, and a somewhat homely native wit that was keen and stinging; and certain it was that his vituperation was in no degree delicately barbed. Even the self-restraint of the elder man was tested to the limit.

And presently, when the fine of twenty-five dollars and costs—twenty-eight dollars and thirty cents, all told—had been inflicted and paid over, the owner of the motor car released the safety valve.

"Judge Wiggin," he said, "I'm com-

elled to tell you that it has never been my misfortune to witness a greater farce or a more ridiculous travesty of justice. You made it absolutely evident that, from the very beginning, your mind was made up and that you would impose a fine, regardless of extenuating circumstances. You practically warned us that any attempt at defense would merely increase the sum of money you were determined to get out of us. Such narrow-minded bigotry stamps you as a man unfit to represent this district in the legislature."

Nathan Wiggin bent a grim and steady eye upon him. "And them few remarks," he returned placidly, "constitute a clear case of contempt, for which I shall have to tuck on another twenty-five dollars, to preserve the dignity of the court. However, considering the fact that the last time I heard you speak from the stump you shot off a whole lot of balderdash, for all of which the so-called intelligent voters of this State saw fit to elect you governor, I'll remit the fine. And discretion being the better part of valor, let me suggest that you bottle up further seething criticism until we both get outside, where, as man to man, we can tell each other jest what we think, without mincin' words."

CHAPTER VI.

A DEMONSTRATION POSTPONED.

ABOMBHELL, exploding in that room, could hardly have created a greater sensation. The governor! The governor of the State, arrested for speeding in the little town of Greenbush, had been fined by Judge Wiggin, who, as a would-be candidate for the legislature, required the support and votes in his district of the governor's own party!

Further than that, more extraordinary, more incomprehensible, having immediately recognized the governor as

one of the two offenders, the judge had dared to reprimand him precisely as if he were an ordinary citizen; possibly with a trifle more caustic severity. And Nat Wiggin was altogether too shrewd and long-headed not to realize that a single word from the chief executive of the State would be almost certain to blast his political ambitions.

Nevertheless, a little calm thought would have led Wiggin's neighbors there assembled to realize that his fearless action was precisely what they might have expected of him. Never in his life had he played the toady, and he was not a person to cringe in the presence of power and pomp. "Without fear or favor" was his motto, and, right or wrong, he adhered to it. Hard-headed and obstinate he might be, but he was not inconsistent.

The spectators crowded forward on tiptoe, gaping, almost aghast. Frowning and grim, his face purple with anger, the governor stared at the judge. Calm and unperturbed as a June morning, the latter announced that court was adjourned, and rose from his seat. Trembling with deepest indignation, the governor's secretary pulled at his elbow.

"Come," urged Hitchens in a low tone, "let's get out before I lose control of myself and twist that old lunatic's nose."

"I don't think you'd better try that, here or elsewhere, under any provocation," returned the chief executive. "I've a notion he'd take as much pleasure in fighting as in fining a speeder."

They turned toward the stairs, the spectators, still staring wide-eyed, clattering back to open a lane through which they could pass. Weeping Buzzell was ahead of them, galvanized into unusual and amazing activity.

"Make way for the governor!" he snuffled, waving his arms.

Down the stairs in advance he stumped, bursting with eagerness to carry the news to those apathetic towns-

men who had not been drawn by curiosity to the courtroom. Marvelous and incredible was the swiftness with which that news spread. Small boys carried it, scurrying. The governor had been nabbed for breaking the speed limit; Judge Wiggin had reprimanded and fined him. Villagers of both sexes and all ages came hurrying toward Turner's store, anxious to get a glimpse of the notable who had met such summary and impartial treatment at the hands of the "jedge." Hitchens saw them assembling.

"Let's get out of this hole," he urged. "All the jays in the town will be here in less than ten minutes." He made for the automobile, which stood in front of the store, headed down the street.

"We've got to find George," said the governor, following. "It's odd he hasn't shown up. Wonder what's become of him."

As they paused irresolutely beside the motor car the judge, having issued forth, approached. There was nothing placating or apologetic in his manner, nor did he wear an offensive, defiant air.

"Governor," he said, "if you'd seen fit to notify me by telephone that business of importance made it necessary for you to go skihooting through this town, I'd have had the speed limit raised to fifty miles an hour for the occasion, and the officers keepin' an open and clear road for ye. But when you was ketched, and hauled up before me, same as any other private person, and give a fictitious name, I figgered there was only one way to handle the case, which was the same as I'd handle any other. I'm agin' these here highway locomotives on principle, and I'd fine the Czar of Roosia if he was took up for speeding in one within the limits of this town."

Something like a faint smile began to play around the corners of the governor's mouth. "How many times have

you ridden in an automobile, Judge Wiggin?" he asked.

"Jest about as many times as you've rid on the tail of a comet, governor. A good, fast-steppin' hoss suits me."

"Exactly. And you've driven some fast steppers in your time. No doubt you've driven them through the streets of this town at a much greater speed than eight miles an hour, thus endangering the lives of pedestrians and others upon the highways."

"Endangerin' fiddlesticks! I know how to handle hosses, sir. I've broke and trained hundreds of 'em in my day. I know how to guide 'em and how to stop 'em."

"Still you may not realize that an expert driver of a motor car has far more perfect control over his machine than the driver of a spirited horse can possibly have over the animal. Likewise, an auto moving at the same relative speed as a horse attached to a carriage may be stopped more quickly than the horse. Therefore the machine, properly handled, is a smaller menace to human safety than a horse-drawn carriage."

"Governor," said Nathan P. Wiggin, "politeness forbids me to tell you jest what I think of that statement. Besides, I've got my coat on."

"If you're too prejudiced," said the governor, "get into this car with me, and you shall have a demonstration."

Just how this invitation would have been received at that moment cannot be said. Through the crowd came a panting, freckled, red-headed young man, flinging people aside with his long arms.

"Hey, Jedge Wiggin!" he called chokingly. "Bessie's gone crazy! Come home quick!"

"Whut's that, Lem Dodd?" cried the judge, snapping round and grabbing the young man by the shoulder. "My daughter—gone crazy? What d'ye mean?"

"Jest whut I say," insisted Lem Dodd

chokingly. "She brung a strange young feller inter the house, and he's got a crack on his *cabeza*, and he keeled over on the parlor sof'y, and he looked like he was a goner, with his eyes shet, and she hollered and flopped on her knees beside him, and called him 'Reginald' and 'dear,' and called herself a murderer, and kissed him right slap on the kisser." He caught his breath with a gulping sound of distress. "And when Miss Sally asked her who he was, she said she didn't know, and he don't b'long round these parts, for I never see him before, and she's crazy as a June bug or she'd never do no such thing."

"This," said the judge, "is a case for immejiate investigation. Under the circumstances, governor, we'll have to postpone that demonstration till some future date."

Then he set off for his home, a short distance up the street, accompanied by the agitated and urgent Lemuel Dodd.

CHAPTER VII.

A NOVICE AT THE WHEEL.

THE governor and Hitchens made inquiry of the crowd regarding their missing driver, but no one present seemed to have seen the man. Presently the governor turned to his secretary.

"You don't imagine," he asked in a low tone, "that the young man who is injured in Judge Wiggin's house can be George?"

"The girl called him Reginald, according to that fellow who brought word to the judge."

"Still, I've got a queer notion that it may be the boy. Let's investigate."

When they reached Wiggin's front door, George, a bandage tied round his head, was just coming out, followed by the judge, who seemed to be highly disturbed and indignant.

"I'm all right now, governor," called the young man reassuringly. "A disagreeable bull helped me over a fence, and I sort of collapsed after walking into town."

"Governor," said Nathan Wiggin grimly, "as near as I can find out, your shuffer climbed a tree to git away from a toothless, half-blind old shepherd dog, and run like the devil when Libby's bull took after him. Then he follered my darter home, and walked right into the house arter her. Whuther or not he was shammin' when he flopped on the sof'y with his eyes shet, Bessie was upset and made a touse over him. She's a ruther emotional girl. My sister's lookin' after her now, and I've told her what I think of shuffers in gen'r'l and young men that climb trees to get away from dogs without teeth enough to dent a biscuit."

The governor laughed. "There may be an excuse for the young man," he said. "He was bitten by a vicious dog when very young, but I don't think bulls could scare him much." He put his arm across the shoulders of the young man. "Are you sure you're not hurt much, George?"

"Well, not on the head," was the reply. "But that girl came pretty near finishing me. She's a perfect witch, and I—"

"Such a statement concerning my darter is slanderous, considering the fuss she made over him," said Judge Wiggin in deep resentment. "But I don't s'pose it's anything more than could be expected of an ordinary shuffer."

Again the governor laughed in a peculiar way. "Perhaps not," he admitted, turning back to the judge. "I'd like to convince you, however, that my argument about automobiles was right, and, as long as you prevented me from catching my train after I had spent three hours persuading Ephraim Glover, of Palmyra, to withdraw and not con-

test you in the primaries, I think it is up to you to give me the chance."

First Nathan Wiggin looked astonished, and then slowly his face turned red.

"Was that whut brought you inter these parts?" he asked.

"That was the principal business. Glover was so hard to handle that I was delayed until it was only possible for me to get back by train in time for an important meeting to-night."

Judge Wiggin's embarrassment was painful. "Governor," he said, "circumstances alter cases. I'm ruther sorry circumstances interfered with that important app'ntment of yours. But whinin' never stopped a blister from smarting, and it's too late to dodge after you've been jabbed by the business end of a hornet. Although I've said I'd never set foot in one of them gas-wagon contraptions, considering who's invited me, if you'll agree to proceed circumspect and decorous within the town limits, and promise to land me back here safe and sound, I'm going to take you up."

"Done," accepted Governor Bradley. "Come along, judge."

Back to Turner's grocery, where the bigger part of the curious crowds still hovered around the touring car, they went, the governor walking arm in arm with Nathan Wiggin, greatly to the wonderment of the staring throng.

"I want you to sit on the forward seat so that you can watch the driver operate the car, judge," said the governor, opening one of the forward doors. "Get in!"

The incredulous and bewildered spectators gasped when the judge complied without a murmur to this invitation. Lem Dodd had said that Bessie Wiggin had gone crazy, and now it seemed that Bessie's father was ready for a padded cell.

"Wull, what d'ye think o' that?" mumbled old Abner Nutter, poking his

thumb into the ribs of Joshua Philbrook. "The jedge—goin' bubble ridin' arter he's swore a hundred times that there wasn't money enough in the United States treasury to hire him to set in one o' them berjiggered things. I've heerd him say it with my own two ears."

"They've hippynotized him," was Philbrook's opinion. "Nothin' else explains it. He ain't in his right mind."

"Perhaps you'd better let Hitchens drive, George," said the governor, addressing the injured young man. "I declare, you're pale! Sure you're not badly hurt?"

"Somehow walking makes me dizzy," was the answer. "Still, I'm feeling better. I think I'll step into this store and get a drink of water."

Having become suddenly anxious, the chief executive followed him into the store. Hitchens, fretful and none too well pleased with the governor for wasting so much time on Wiggin, left the latter sitting in the car and mounted the store steps.

Aware that the accusing eyes of his fellow townsmen were upon him, Nathan Wiggin gave his attention to the mechanism of the car as displayed before him. He examined the levers and pedals, squinted at the clock and the speedometer and the gasoline gauge. He wondered at the numerous contrivances of push buttons and small levers on the dash. He even bent forward and curiously moved one of the latter from one side to the other. About that time a bold urchin who had climbed on the running board released the emergency brake.

It was a cry of warning from somebody in the crowd that made Judge Wiggin aware that the car was moving. It had been standing on a gentle incline, with its nose pointing down the long main street, and had started as soon as the brake was set free.

"Hey!" shouted an excited voice.
"She's goin'! Jump, jedge!"

Nathan Wiggin did not jump. He was not greatly alarmed at first. The thing had barely started; it was not running away. He had broken and trained vicious horses that other men could do nothing with, some of them veritable man-killers, and surely he could stop an inanimate contrivance like a motor car, especially when it was not under power. Possibly he was restrained also by a conviction that he could not abandon the car with dignity, and by the knowledge that to abandon it at all under such circumstances would possibly make him an object of ridicule. He knew with what keen gusto the Greenbushers "harped on a joke" and nagged the victim thereof.

"Whoa!" said the judge, moving quickly over into the driver's seat and grasping the wheel. "Whoa back!"

The car moved on, those persons who had been in front of it hastily scrambling out of the way. The judge braced hard with one foot against the clutch pedal, but that did not seem to have any effect. He grabbed one of the levers, thinking it might be the brake, and gave it a yank. It was the lever that manipulated the gears. At the same time his foot slipped off the clutch pedal.

Thrown into gear, the moving car cranked itself, and the engine leaped to life with a sudden vibrating hum. For in shifting the tiny lever on the dash Judge Wiggin had made connections with the magneto. The surprised man gasped as the machine gave a sudden forward lunge, like a horse beneath the stinging cut of a whip. Almost before he could gasp twice, the confounded thing was running away.

"Whoa!" shouted the dismayed man commandingly, surging back on the wheel with all his strength. "If the bit holds, I'll break your jaw, you——"

One foot was planted on the accelerator, jamming it down and opening the throttle wide. The engine roared beneath the quivering hood. The car made a jump that seemed to take all four wheels off the ground. Judge Wiggin's hat flew off, his sparse gray hair stood on end, his eyes bulged; but between his parted, drawn-back lips his teeth were set. Behind him he heard the horrified shouts of the crowd, through which Hitchens had vainly tried to plow a path in time to board the machine before it could get beyond his reach. Realizing he had failed, Hitchens stopped and flung up his arms in despair.

"The old fool!" he groaned. "He'll smash the car! He'll be killed!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WORSE THAN A WILD HORSE.

ANNOYED and amazed by the inexplicable and cantankerous behavior of the automobile, Nathan Wiggin was, at the same time, aroused to resentment and wrath. The confounded thing was acting exactly like a wild, viciously ugly, unbroken colt. Immediately the judge's fighting blood rose. He was stirred by the tingling joy of contest; it throbbed in every vein of his body. Still holding the throttle wide open with one foot, he planted the other on the brake, and sawed at the wheel.

The things the automobile did then made it seem more than ever like a strong and furious young horse battling against restraint and mastery. It bucked and plunged in jerky jumps; it "pitched fence-cornered" from side to side, after the style of a Western broncho; it snorted and choked and snorted again.

"Whoa, you dratted catamaran!" snarled the judge. "You've gotter whoa or I'll take your jaw off!"

Only for the down grade he might have stalled the engine before the rack-

ing of the car caused his foot to fly off the brake pedal. When that happened, it continued on its way down the hill toward the wooden bridge that spanned the Swampscott River, swaying from one side of the road to the other. At times it threatened to climb trees or telephone poles, or crash through fences and plunge like a battering-ram into the fronts of houses or stores. But always the crazy machine swerved in time to avoid disaster, and shot across to the other side of the road.

When his right hand slipped from the wheel, the judge grabbed the side of the car body, and his clutching thumb jammed down the button that operated the electric siren. The button stuck, and the siren howled like a doomed demon of despair, causing Nathan Wiggin's hair to stand up stiff as the bristles on a horse brush.

The fearsome sound of the wailing whistle brought people running to windows to behold a sight no one in Greenbush had ever expected to see—Judge Wiggin driving an automobile! To say that he was driving it more than borders on hyperbole; it would be far closer to the truth to state that it was driving him—frantic! He was not habitually a profane man, but he possessed a broad vocabulary of vigorous expletives of a more or less impious nature; and it must be admitted that the language he addressed to that motor car would have shocked a parson. Those who dashed to their windows in time to see him shoot zigzagging past beheld a man that was little short of raving mad.

Hens that had been scratching peacefully in the village street fled, squawking. Barking furiously, a yellow dog charged out. The car leaped at the animal, struck it with one forward wheel, and sent it, spinning and howling, into the gutter.

Deaf as a doormat, old Betsy

Tucker, going to market with a hand basket containing two dozen eggs, neither saw nor heard until the runaway auto was perilously close upon her and the judge was howling like a maniac for her to "clear the road." Then she gave a yell and threw up her arms, flinging basket and eggs into the air. She was saved by sheer luck, for the judge, plunging at the wheel, turned the machine so that it missed her by less than a foot. The basket came down, bottom up, on Nathan Wiggin's head, and the eggs—well, for some moments thereafter the judge could not have seen to drive, had he possessed the required skill. From his shoulders up he resembled the initial preparation of an omelet.

"Holy sassafras!" he spluttered. "It's raining fish glue! Everything happens at once!"

As soon as he could blink a pair of peepholes through that golden film—he did not dare let go with his hands to wipe his eyes—he saw that the foot of the hill was almost reached, and that the bridge across the peacefully flowing river lay just ahead. It was not a very wide bridge, and Tobias Blaisdell, perched on a load of hay drawn by two horses, was just driving on to the far end.

"Back up, you blinkety-blank jay-hawker!" yelled the judge. "Make a clear passage or I'll bore a tunnel in ye!"

Had he been less excited he would have realized that it was much too late for such a cumbersome obstruction to get out of the way. Blaisdell had time only to check his horses and stare in horror at the shrieking engine of destruction that was charging upon him. He did not recognize Nathan Wiggin in the egg-bespattered wild man who seemed to be guiding the humming mechanism of disaster, but he knew that, in about four seconds, unless a miracle intervened, horses, motor car,

hay, and human beings were going to be mixed in a spectacular and tragic smash.

Then, as the uncontrolled automobile reached the middle span of the bridge, the miracle took place. Shooting suddenly to one side, the machine struck the wooden railing, and went through it as if it had been constructed of clay pipestems. Into the deepest part of the river it plunged, flinging up a great splash of spray, and disappeared from view. Nathan Wiggin, of Greenbush, vanished with it.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN THE LIMIT CAME OFF.

TH E shouts of the startled crowd in front of Turner's grocery had brought those within the store rushing out to learn the cause of alarm. The governor came with them, followed a second later by the young man who had been tossed by Libby's bull. They beheld the motor car well under way, and the judge struggling frantically and ineffectually to restrain it.

"Great guns!" groaned the governor, turning pale. "Wiggin's started the demonstration on his own hook. He'll smash a four-thousand-dollar car and his neck at the same time!"

The young man with the bandaged head stiffened. If he felt weak or dizzy at that moment, he flung it off instantly. With a single bound he was at the foot of the store steps, against which leaned a bicycle, left there temporarily by some one. He grabbed the bicycle, uttering a ringing shout for everybody to get out of the way.

Through the scattered crowd he dashed, leaping to the saddle and catching the pedals with his nimble feet. Bending over the handlebars, he started in pursuit of the automobile, which, by this time, was halfway down the hill, with the wailing siren in full blast.

Continuing to jabber and shout, the crowd followed, stringing out in a straggling line. Boys and younger men were in the lead. Middle-aged, bewhiskered, bald-headed men came next. The rear guard was made up of the aged and decrepit; the very last one of all, bent with rheumatism, and hobbling with the aid of two canes, being Zebediah Titcomb, the sage of Greenbush.

Never since its foundation had the sleepy town of Greenbush beheld such a spectacle. Never in its history had there been such tremendous excitement within its boundaries. The end of all things terrestrial could scarcely have created a greater hullabaloo in that torpid community.

The young man on the bicycle was not able to overtake the runaway motor car before it reached the bridge, but he was not far behind it. When the automobile smashed through the railing and leaped into the river, he jumped from the bicycle and followed it without the slightest hesitation.

He was an excellent swimmer, and, rising from the plunge, he saw the head of Nathan Wiggin bob to the surface within reach of his arm. Immediately he fastened a hand on the man's collar.

"Keep still! Stop thrashing," he said, "and I'll get you out."

The somewhat difficult task of rescuing Judge Wiggin from drowning was accomplished, while the panting throng that had reached the bridge looked on and cheered. Reaching shallow water, the young man assisted the judge to his feet, and both waded forth to dry land.

Arriving on shore, the older man immediately sat down facing the river, beneath the sluggish surface of which Governor Bradley's automobile lay immersed. After a few choking gulps, he began to speak in accents and words of the utmost self-contempt.

"Nate Wiggin," he said, addressing himself, "you've lived to be fifty-four

year old, and arrived at the conclusion that there wasn't anything that traveled on legs or wheels that you couldn't handle. Which goes to show that when a man thinks he knows all there is to know about anything a shrinkage has set in about half an inch beneath the roots of his hair. A wise fool is about as safe to have round as a stick of dynamite bakin' in the oven of a red-hot stove. If he don't damage nobody else, he's pretty likely to blow up and bust himself."

The governor and his secretary, followed by a few others, came hurrying to the spot. Seeing them approach, the judge got upon his feet, dripping tiny rivulets.

"Governor," he observed, "there's no great loss without some small gain. You'll save the price of a wash for that there automobile. Whatever damage or expense may accrue I ca'lale I'll have to sustain. I guess we can find a way to get her out."

"I'm thankful," said Governor Bradley, "that you were not killed."

"I don't see why that should choke you with joy. In your place I'd prob'lly be so blazin' mad I'd start in to murder somebody."

His eyes streaming and his nose snuffling, Weeping Buzzell broke in: "Obadaiah Cobb has come along with his hoss and wagon. He's right there at the end of the bridge, and he'll take ye home, jedge. You better git outer them wet clothes if you don't want to ketch your everlarsting."

"I'm no wetter'n this young feller who yanked me outer the drink," said the judge. "He's got to come along to the house with me and get fixed up. And you, too, governor, and t'other gentleman—you come; I insist on it. You're going to stop with me, the whole caboodle of ye, to supper. Hosspitality deferred may be hosspitality soured, but I'll guarantee to do my best to sweeten it up on this occasion."

By this time it seemed that by far the greater portion of the inhabitants of the town were packed upon the bridge or jamming the roadway. And when Obadiah Cobb took the governor, the judge, and the other two men into his double seater and started back up the hill with them, the crowd laughed and cheered again.

"Governor," said Judge Wiggin, "I dunno whether that's meant for you or for the young man who hauled me out of the stream, but either way it's proper well deserved. If you hadn't been dead game, you'd have kicked like a steer over what's happened, and if he wasn't good grit to the bone he'd never have gone into the river arter me. Which is admittin' I made a mistake in sizing him up when I found my darter making a touse over him."

Among the few villagers who remained unaware of the recent lively events were Judge Wiggin's sister and his daughter. Of course they were thrown into a great flutter. Miss Sally said: "My stars!" What Miss Bessie said was whispered into the ear of the water-soaked but smiling young man, who gave her a look and a sly squeeze of the hand that brought a rosy flush to her cheeks.

Dry clothes were found; also "a little nip of something to parry off chills." Warming up, the participants in the adventure joked and laughed, even though the judge seemed to have something on his mind that was giving him some serious thought. What this was appeared later after they had partaken of a genuine old-fashioned New England supper, topped off with doughnuts and hot apple pie and steaming, fragrant coffee.

Turning his eyes to the governor, who sat at the right of Miss Sally, Nathan Wiggin said: "Governor, putting aside the question of damages I owe on account of what happened to your automobile, I ca'lale it's up to me to ex-

press my appreciation of whut you done to induce Ephraim Glover to take back and give me a clear field. With a clear start, I reckon I can carry this dees-trict, and help you to carry the county. Anyhow, I'm going to lay myself out to do it."

"That sounds good to me," laughed the governor.

"Furthermore," pursued the host, "I've decided to abolish the trapping of automobile drivers in this here town. Mebbe," he admitted, "this may appear a leetle dite selfish on my part as, havin' got my dander up by the pranks played on me by that there gas go-cart of yourn, governor, I'm contemplating buying one myself and running the consarned cantraption until I git it tamed. If there was traps hereabouts, mebbe I'd git took up and have to fine myself for busting the speed limit. Therefore, henceforth there ain't going to be no speed limit in Greenbush."

Beneath the edge of the table, old Shep, attempting to lick Bessie's hand with his tongue, licked also the hand of the young man who sat beside her. And before sitting down, the young people had found an opportunity, quite unobserved, to exchange a few words in private. Somehow neither of them had evinced any great desire for food, but while George was still unnaturally pale, the roses continued to bloom in Bessie's cheeks.

Now George spoke up boldly: "As long as you have abolished the speed limit, Judge Wiggin, I am going to improve the occasion to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage. Doubtless it will seem rather hasty to you, but everything has moved with a rush this afternoon. I have put the question to Bessie, and won her consent."

The governor stared. Miss Nancy nearly fainted. Bessie Wiggin trembled visibly. Nathan P. Wiggin gazed hard at the young man for about thirty sec-

onds, and then scratched his chin, a queer pucker screwing up his face.

"Wull, I declare!" said the judge at last. "That is going some! Never quite reckoned on my darter hookin' up with a shuffer, but, having saved me from drownding, you've took me at a disadvantage. If Bessie has said yes, and you kin furnish the proper creedenshuls I'll have to take your proposition under consideration, I guess."

The governor looked Bessie Wiggin over appraisingly, and decided that he had made no mistake in thinking her an unusually pretty and charming young lady.

"It is sudden," he said, laughing softly, "and it would not have happened if George had not offered to drive for me to-day, my regular chauffeur being ill. In the way of credentials, judge, let me state that he is my son."

The judge's sister sat bolt upright in a jiffy. The judge coughed behind his hand, the pucker crinkling the corners of his eyes.

"Them creedenshuls, governor," he stated, "are wholly satisfactory to me." His whole body seemed to shake oddly. "I'm afraid I'm going to have a chill, after all," he added. "I think the governor and me had better take a little walk in the moonlight."

The Visitor

IS that clock right?" asked the visitor, who had already oustayed his welcome.

His hostess yawned. "Oh, no!" she said. "That's the clock we always call 'The Visitor.'"

The obdurate one sat down again.

"The Visitor!" he remarked. "What a curious name to give a clock!"

His hostess ventured to explain.

"You see," she cooed sweetly, "we call it that because we can never make it go!"

And then he went.

The Jitney

By Arthur Brooks Baker

THE Jitney is a humble coin of nickel and alloy,
Quite admirably fitted to the uses of a boy.
It buys a sack of goobers from the gay Sicilian gent,
It gets a fellow past the chap who guards the movie tent.

Not very many years ago the Jitney was so small
That men of dignity refused to notice it at all;
And then there came an era of magicians who, like Yates,
Could hammer with the Jitney on the tallest social gates.

The little coin was gathered by our thrifty telephones,
For twenty thousand Jitneys constitute a thousand bones,
And then the lowly thing achieved the sacred realm of art—
The great and thrilling photo-plays had won the public heart.

To-day—let all the poets tune their celebrative chimes—
The holiest tradition of our mighty modern times
Is broken by the Jitney; for the taxicab cinch,
Whose cheerful transportation rate was thirty cents an inch,
Is humbled and is jumbled by the jolly Jitney bus,
While common folks throw up their hats and make a merry
fuss.

One chorus, if no other, then, the Jitney song repeats,
To the public, not our statesmen, belong the public streets.

A Tale of the Black Hills —

Fort Extra

By
W.S.Birge.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

"YOUNG GRAYHEAD."

IT would have puzzled a government expert to give a plausible reason for the erection of the "blockhouse, barracks, and stockade," beyond the Black Hills, that even the army teamsters christened Fort Extra. Its uselessness was so palpable that, when Colonel Brown had completed his first tour of inspection of his district after assuming command, he decided that Fort Extra was to be abandoned, especially as the probable exigencies of the service would require a concentration of the meager force at his disposal for the protection of that frontier.

A colonel was a great man in those old days, and his word was law—until the secretary of war should be heard from. The brief importance of the little post was therefore over, and preparations for leaving it went forward.

Colonel Brown had not only a wife who was brave and charming, but a blooming daughter, and both Annie and her mother had accompanied the gray-haired commander on his tour of inspection. They had enjoyed it very much, but by the time they had arrived at Fort Extra the unwonted fatigue and exposure had proved, for the while, a little too much, and it became necessary for them to rest a few days. This was all the more vexatious to the colonel, as his presence was imperatively demanded at Fort Berry, which was forty miles and more southeast of the Black Hills, to attend a council of the Indian commissioners to arrange a treaty with the Pawnees and other tribes. He did not like to go without his dear ones, but duty was duty, and he could hardly have explained to himself the strange feeling of dread that tugged at his heart as he kissed them good-by and rode away.

"Annie," said Mrs. Brown as she wiped the tears from her eyes, "we



must move just as quickly as we are able."

"So we must, mother," agreed Annie; "but since I am hardly sick at all I must take care of you and make sure that you do not start too soon."

"Your father said that he had left orders for the supplies and heavier materials to be moved to Fort Berry at once. There are no cannon, except the small howitzer, and by the time we are ready we can have the poor little fort empty."

"Do you know, mother," said Annie, "I sometimes feel half sorry for the poor little fort, as you call it? It seems like a case of cruel desertion."

"Still, Annie," replied the colonel's wife, "I shall be very glad when I feel able to ride again, and Lieutenant Dean tells me he is ready."

"So will I, mother. What a fine old fellow Lieutenant Dean is, with his scarred face and his gray mustache! I am glad he is in command just now."

"Yes," said her mother, "there seems to be something solid and reliable about him. So different from those young sprigs they are sending out here from West Point."

Meanwhile, never dreaming that he could be made a subject of conversation for the ladies, the lieutenant, or, as he himself preferred to be called when addressed unofficially, plain John Dean, was busy in another part of the fortification superintending the departure of the convoys of supplies and other materials, in pursuance of Colonel Brown's orders. In his inmost heart he was hoping that the indisposition of the ladies would not continue long, for the attitude of some of the more powerful tribes was more than threatening, and he felt that every man he sent away was an important subtraction from what might at any moment become the means of protecting his charges.

John Dean was what, in a day when the officers of the army were almost

an aristocratic caste by themselves, might have been called one of the accidents of the service. A gentleman, no doubt of it, but seemingly entirely without friends or influence, and with some inscrutable jealousy against him in the bureaus at Washington. Somehow, after years of faithful service, he had seen incompetence and worthlessness again and again promoted over his head, until his heart was sore and faint within him, and he had begun to think that his days would be spent with but one "bar" on his shoulder straps, no matter how assiduously, ably, or brilliantly he might perform his arduous and perilous duties.

"Old Dean," his fellow officers sometimes called him, and yet, although his strongly marked, manly features were crowned by a bushy head of iron-gray hair, Dean was in the very prime of early manhood—only thirty-six, and with a heart as fresh as a boy's. His frontier service had taught him more of the wiles of the red man than of the dangerous characteristics of the better half of his own race; he was still young.

Great as was his anxiety about Mrs. Brown and her beautiful daughter, Lieutenant Dean would hardly have dreamed of showing it otherwise than by his professional care for their safety. No ladies' man was he, but no woman could have asked for a truer knight or a better defender than the "young gray-head," as the Indians called him, with his towering frame and his sinews of steel.

CHAPTER II.

RAGGED HAND'S SIGNATURE.

THE colonel and his escort arrived safely at Fort Berry, to find the expected array of commissioners and traders waiting for them and for the painted heroes of the plains to "come in and be palavered."

The appointed day for the powwow came, and some of the expected savages were on hand and some were not, for there was discontent abroad among the tribes, and trouble was brewing. Almost every hour brought in some news or rumor that added to the anxiety of Colonel Brown concerning the treasures he had left so scantily guarded behind the palisades of Fort Extra.

Nevertheless, there was the customary routine of councils, and smoker and solemn foolery of handshaking, for the Pawnee bands, at least, had agreed to the conditions proposed to them, and were ready to have their treaty signed.

All this, however, had been work for the civilians, and the army men had nothing to do but to look dangerous, and look on, with an internal conviction that, for all this formality and humbug, there would be little less duty to be done thereafter in their own peculiar line. At last, however, when the very act of signing was in hand, Colonel Brown stood by the door of the commissioner's tent with his staff about him in full uniform, grimly conscious that he and they were but acting parts in an exceedingly doubtful drama.

Chief after chief stepped forward grandly and scrawled his token or made his mark upon the formal parchment, under direction of their interpreters; and the colonel had regarded their strut and vaporizing with ill-disguised contempt and disgust. And now a tall, scarred, ferocious-looking warrior, younger in years than most of the others, but fully their peer in ugliness, strode up to the improvised table. He seemed to be acquainted with the use of a pen, for he motioned aside the interpreter with a disdainful "ugh," and took the quill in his own hand.

But such a hand! It was more like the claws of the grizzly bear that hung from the warrior's own collar and that elsewhere adorned his gaudy, fantastic dress. Colonel Brown looked keenly at

him from under his stiff gray eyebrows, and a young officer at his elbow remarked in an undertone:

"Did you ever see a paw like that?"

The colonel made no reply, for he half thought he had, and in a moment he was sure, for the "totem," or rather, in this case, the "sign manual," which the haughty savage drew with the pen was a tolerably neat outline of the bony claws that made it, and as he drew back to his full height he bared his arm to the elbow and said, with swelling pride, as he displayed an almost fleshless mass of sinews and tendons:

"Ugh! Ragged Hand big chief! Friend of white man! Ugh!"

And with this he turned on his heel and stalked stately away to the solemn group of his fellow chiefs.

"Montrose, Geary!" almost excitedly called out the colonel to the officer who had spoken and a man in civilian attire who stood near him. "I know that fellow and I want to see him. Manage to bring him around as soon as you can."

The sharp, quick tone of command brought something like a flush to the cheek of the young man addressed as Geary, but the colonel added:

"None of that, my dear boy. This is a family matter, and I shall be likely to need your help, especially as you talk Indian."

A pleasant, though still somewhat haughty, smile arose in Geary's dark and handsome features. He followed Montrose without a word until they were beyond Colonel Brown's hearing; then he said:

"My confounded pride! And the colonel rubs it the wrong way all the while. You see, Captain Montrose, my father was an army scout and interpreter before he bought his mines so luckily, and half the old officers I meet seem to think I was born to obey their orders. He was a splendid scout and fighter, though, and they all respected

him. Even the colonel seems to make a friend of me for his sake."

"He does, indeed," replied Montrose, with an almost manifest twinge of jealousy, "and I've half a notion I know what he wants to see that torn-up red-skin for."

It may be that Montrose was right, but an hour later found their errand accomplished, and a group of four gathered in the colonel's tent. Ragged Hand himself had been speaking, and, oddly enough, Geary had been acting as interpreter.

"Well, Ragged Hand," now replied the colonel, "I am glad you feel so grateful. I only did for you what I would have done for any brave fellow in such a fix. But this is bad news. No wonder the Blackfeet bands didn't want to come in. Two trains destroyed, and they're waiting for the remainder. I hardly know what to do, for I'm terribly short of men, and Fort Berry must not be left weak-handed. Captain Montrose, my wife and daughter will be with this last train from that unlucky Fort Extra—think of that!"

The colonel's face grew ashy under its beard and bronze, and the young men looked gravely at him and at one another. It was a startling and terrible fact to talk about to a husband and father, soldier though he was.

"Colonel Brown," said Montrose after a brief pause, "our garrison is not so small but what I can be spared with a squad to ride on and reënforce the train. At all events, Dean should be warned of his danger."

"And I!" suddenly exclaimed Geary. "I can raise a score of good men among these chaps that are loafing around the fort, and Ragged Hand will send a party of braves with us."

The old officer reached out both his hands to the young men, but the Pawnee chief sententiously remarked, and Geary rapidly interpreted—for the chief

understood better than he could speak, as is common:

"Ragged Hand go—not send. White chief save him once. Made great brave of him. Pawnee never forget."

"Yes," added Geary, "and it's high time I made my own acquaintance with you. Look at that!"

The Pawnee gravely unwrapped the packet handed him, but his whole face changed as he did so, for it disclosed the forepaw of a grizzly bear, with curious notches on the claws.

"Who are you?" he asked of Geary.

"My father gave me that," was the reply, "and he told me it would make a friend among the Pawnees."

"Son of Many Tongues?" said Ragged Hand as he took a long look at the tall and handsome young white man. "Well, very glad. Father good friend. Go get men. No time now for great talk."

"What does he say?" eagerly asked the colonel. "Will he go?" Geary rapidly explained.

"He is right," said the colonel. "There is not an hour to lose. I fear you have a dangerous scout before you, for the Blackfeet are out in great force. Montrose, you take twenty men of your own company, and Geary may enlist as many volunteers as he can find. They will all be in government service for the time. The sooner you are off the better."

The Pawnee chief had disappeared silently even while the colonel was speaking, and the two young men quickly took their leave and hastened away to their preparations. As they walked on for a moment side by side, Montrose said to his companion:

"If you only knew what a splendid girl the colonel's daughter Annie is you'd be able to muster any amount of enthusiasm at being sent out to save her."

"I met her in Washington last winter," somewhat coldly responded Geary.

"I may say I know her very well. I shall be ready to start by nightfall, I think."

A quick flash sprang to the blue eyes of the army captain, and one as rapid and even more dangerous looking met it in those of Geary. There was silence for a moment, but the soldier had best control of himself, for he spoke first:

"So much the better. As you are to be under my command I desire you to have your men provided with three days' rations."

"Under your command?" was the quick and half-angry reply.

"Certainly, and so will the Pawnees be. It won't do to have two heads on an expedition like this. You would not expect to command regular army men?"

It was evidently all that Geary could do to command himself, for the idea of being a subordinate had not entered his head before, but he managed to answer between his teeth:

"Of course not. I'll be ready."

As he walked away, however, he mentally registered a vow that his undertaking in behalf of the colonel's daughter should be on his own hook. Nor was he far out of the way in his imagination that Captain Montrose was at the same time chuckling to himself over the supposed fact that any merit and success that might be won would be credited to himself, as the officer in command. Still, he was too good a fighter not to be prompt and thorough in getting his men ready for the undertaking. His wide acquaintance with the scouts, traders, and mountain men who had been brought to the fort by the occasion, and the word that he wanted volunteers to rescue a train from the Blackfeet and that there were women in danger, brought the rough-and-ready fellows around him in short order. In less than an hour he had nearly forty men in the saddle, with "rations for three days," armed with their own rifles.

All the while, however, Geary's pride and jealousy were waxing hot and fierce within him, and when he was ready he waited for no orders from Montrose, nor even from the colonel, but led his well-mounted band of daring spirits swiftly away from the lengthening shadows of Fort Berry. He had plenty of men with him who knew every inch of the road he was to travel.

Great was the wrath and disappointment of Captain Montrose when he heard of Geary's departure, but his disgust was even deeper when word was brought from the Pawnee camp that Ragged Hand and a round hundred of his best warriors also had taken the trail for the Black Hills.

There was no time now, however, for even a complaint to Colonel Brown, and before the September sun had sunk below the horizon he and his blue-coated cavalry were ready for the saddle.

CHAPTER III.

A WORD IN TIME?

SEVERAL days went by after the departure of Colonel Brown from Fort Extra, and John Dean had steadily pressed forward his preparations for abandoning the post. First one train and then another had been loaded up, and started off across the endless prairie; but the guard that could be sent with either of them was but slender, considering that the Blackfeet bands were on the warpath.

Mrs. Brown and Annie were quickly on their feet and anxious to be off, and kept as close to the lieutenant as if their constant presence could aid and hasten him in the discharge of his duties. He, on his part, treated them with a subdued and respectful courtesy that the colonel's wife found immensely agreeable, but Annie more than once found herself in the mental act of extending a species of gentle commiseration to the officer who wore so self-rebuked and

yet so dignified and manly a demeanor. She respected him from the bottom of her heart, even while she half wished that he would be more attentive and companionable.

As they were strolling one afternoon around the already half-deserted little fort, they came upon their protector standing by the gateway of the block-house talking with a man who evidently had just dismounted from the blown and reeking horse whose lariat he was still holding.

"Mrs. Brown," said the lieutenant in a suppressed and all but husky voice, "we have had bad news. This man is the only survivor of our last train, and I fear that the first one has shared the same fate."

"Hardly a doubt of it!" exclaimed the man himself. "I reckon their luck was a good deal like ours."

"That is terrible, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "Do you suppose the colonel can have heard of it?"

"I think not," said the lieutenant; "but it is necessary that he should, if we ourselves are ever to get in. Jones, you are too tired for another ride; send José, the vaquero, here at once."

The man touched his hat and was gone, and they three stood by the gateway talking until an undersized, wiry, dark-looking man reined in his horse in front of them, as if waiting for orders.

"José," said the lieutenant, "ride for your life to Fort Berry. Take the upper pass through the Black Hills. Tell Colonel Brown that I shall do the same, and shall start early to-morrow morning. Tell him also that both the other trains went by way of the lower pass and that they have been destroyed by the Blackfeet. Hand him also this dispatch. Do you understand?"

"*Si, señor,*" replied the man as he touched his cap, and in a moment more he was off and away on his perilous errand.

"Why, Mr. Dean!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown. "I would so have liked to send a message to the colonel."

"Pardon me," replied the lieutenant, "but I was only thinking of your safety, and every minute is golden just now."

The elder lady looked half offended, but Annie thought within herself that John Dean's want of politeness was almost a merit. She said nothing, however, and the remainder of the day wore away gloomily enough at Fort Extra.

No other man can ride faster and farther without rest than a California vaquero, and no other horse can gallop under him more miles than the California-bred burro that José was riding. Some thirty hours thereafter the tireless vaquero spurred his spent and tottering steed up the sloping roadway to the gates of Fort Berry, just as Colonel Brown rode out to say a word to Captain Montrose before his departure.

Promptly, almost mechanically, José delivered his dispatch and his message, and then horse and man seemed to fail and sink helplessly to the ground together. There were strong hands ready to help them, but the colonel himself seemed hardly to give them a thought.

"This news is indeed opportune," he said to the captain. "You will now strike for the upper pass. I will send word after the Pawnees and that hot-headed fool Geary; but you must not wait for them."

"Yes, colonel. Good-by," responded Captain Montrose as he again rode forward.

Wait for them, or for anything else? Why, his heart was bouncing with the thought that his possible rival was on the wrong trail and that to him alone would belong the task of rescuing the colonel's daughter. Instead of being ahead of him, Geary could only come up as a sort of reinforcement, and would be under his command, after all.

The colonel was as good as his word,

however, about the messengers, and before Geary and his men had been on the road four hours they were overtaken by the news which the vaquero had ridden so hard to bring.

Once more the hot blood rushed to the cheeks of Geary. He wondered if, after all, Montrose and his bluecoats would not beat him in the race. At this moment the thunder of pounding hoofs and loud yells in their rear announced the approach of Ragged Hand and his wild riders. Hardly had the new posture of affairs been explained to the chief, however, when he solved the difficulty with the quick, authoritative wisdom of a commanding general.

They would not change their line of march, he said, for it was too late to go by way of the upper pass. The Blackfeet would not now be at the lower one; they never stayed so long at one place. They would go through the lower pass as they had intended, and follow up the other side of the range of hills. They would be likely to reach the train from Fort Extra before Captain Montrose did even then.

The advice of the red warrior was clearly good, and it chimed admirably with Geary's own thoughts and wishes, as well as with those of his men, who much preferred being independent of the regular troops.

And so, late into the night, the several bands of hardy fighters, red and white, rode steadily onward toward whatever termination their adventurous expedition might have, but hardly doubting that it would be a fierce one.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CREST OF A WARRIOR.

LITTLE sleep had John Dean, or any other of the scanty garrison of Fort Extra on the night after he had sent away the vaquero. Whether José got in safely with his news or not there was but one course for the lieutenant

to take, as the post was no longer tenable. Many things that might otherwise have been carried away were battered and broken beyond any future usefulness, and thrown away in all directions. They would have been burned but that the lieutenant did not care to kindle so dangerous a signal fire to indicate his movements to the eyes of red-skin prowlers.

Shortly after sunrise the slender cavalcade was under way, Mrs. Brown and Annie on horseback like the rest. Only four wagons remained, and these not heavily laden. A team of six mules tugged lazily at the mountain howitzer. Two would have been enough, but it was a way of saving the mules.

John Dean shook his iron-gray head as he turned and looked back at the little fortification he was abandoning, and then at his short three dozen of blue-coated veterans. Under other circumstances he might have deemed the one strong enough and the other an army, but now—

"Ah, Mr. Dean," just then exclaimed Annie Brown, "I think I understand you! It seems almost like a capitulation to the Blackfeet. I don't wonder you feel badly."

"No, Miss Brown, it's only a change of base," replied he. "But we have a long and dangerous ride before I can put you and your mother under the protection of even such poor wooden walls as those."

There was something in the tone of Dean's voice, and the expression of his weather-beaten face, that made Annie Brown silent for a moment, although she could hardly have told herself why.

Hour after hour went by, and the bright autumnal sun rose higher and higher, and so far there had been no visible sign of anything like peril. Side by side rode Annie Brown and her mother and the gray-headed young officer, and again and again, as they glanced at his resolute, thoughtful face,

the women felt a certain satisfaction and confidence in their protector that was very pleasant and reassuring.

Noon came, and with it a brief halt for rest and refreshment; but they had hardly gone three miles after they started again before, as they mounted one of the long, low rolls of the prairie, they saw before them, at no great distance, an encampment evidently of white men, yet of a kind and style that they could hardly have expected. There were only a couple of wagons, and beside these were pitched white tents; from these there came forward to meet the train three or four men rigged in what might have passed—in London, for instance—as an out-and-out prairie sporting costume. Loud and hearty was the greeting the strangers gave, but short and ominous enough were John Dean's responses.

"Been to dinner? Ah, so!" said one of the strangers, with a florid face and wonderful whiskers. "Would have been very glad, you know! Hardly thought of meeting ladies out here, to be sure."

"Do you know," half interrupted another, "we're in the most uncomfortable kind of a fix? Came here to hunt, and all that sort of thing, and hardly got out here before these confounded men of ours refuse to go any farther. We haven't seen an aborigine, upon my honor; and these fellows won't talk of anything but scalps and Blackfeet. Spoils our hunt entirely."

"You may thank your men heartily, then," replied John Dean. "The redskins are out in force, and you must not attempt to go any farther."

"We *must not*? How am I to understand you? I beg pardon of the ladies, but you said we *must not* go on with our hunt."

"No; I only said you must go no farther into the Blackfeet range. I presume I know some of your men, and I shall order them to turn back at once and not stop until they have put the

Black Hills a day's journey behind them."

"Do I understand you, sir?" said the Englishman, getting redder and redder in the face. "You'll order my own men to go back, after I've hired them?"

"Certainly I shall," returned Dean, with a smile; "but I earnestly request you to hitch up at once and take advantage of our escort."

"No, indeed; I want no escort but my own! It's a piece of confounded tyranny. Couldn't do it in England, you know! All this talk about the Indians is moonshine, sir—only to spoil our hunt. If I go back at all, sir, I'll go alone. Not but that I hope the ladies will soon be in a place of safety, and I wish them an agreeable ride."

Some other talk there was, but Dean was as good as his word, and passed on with his train, feeling sure that his "confounded tyranny" would prevent his English friends from going any farther, even if they would not turn back.

John Dean was too good and experienced a campaigner to exhaust his cattle or his men on the first day out, but he made a good push of it, and when he went into camp the bald and ragged outlines of the Black Hills stood out in sharp relief against the sky of ever-deepening blue. The scene was one of deep solitude, and as the curtain of night fell on the little camp both Annie and her mother could not help being infected by the deep, overpowering anxiety that made itself felt through all the iron self-control of their friend and guardian. He was morally sure that if the Blackfeet were not already on their trail they would be before the next sun rose. Not a wink did he sleep that night, but seemed to be in all parts of the camp at once, with a nervous watchfulness that would not and could not be caught napping.

Their breakfast was over early the next day, and the train once more in motion. All the forenoon they pressed

steadily onward, still without a sign of danger, and all the while the barrier of the hills that stood between them and safety grew steadily nearer and nearer. When at last they halted, though on high and rising ground, the outlying spurs of the range on either side of them indicated that the pass could not be far to seek.

"Mr. Dean," said Mrs. Brown as the lieutenant looked long and earnestly through his field glass back upon their trail, "do you see anybody coming?" For a minute he was silent, and she added: "Perhaps our English friends have made up their minds to follow us."

"Not they, Mrs. Brown. We are indeed followed, but we shall never see anything more of those Englishmen."

"What do you mean?" asked Annie quickly.

"I mean just this—that I have seen the crest of a redskin warrior, and the Blackfeet are between the Englishmen and any hope. I am afraid their obstinacy has ruined them."

CHAPTER V.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

FROM above the little clump of trees where the camp of the rash hunters had been, away back there beyond Annie Brown's sight or the range of John Dean's glass, a dull and eddying cloud of black smoke was rising. Away from that cloud a swarm of mounted red men were riding, and under it there lay the wrecks of burning wagons, broken weapons, and the charred and mangled forms of human beings.

There were signs, too, of a hard and desperate fight. The Englishmen had been no cowards, and their guides and men had been of the right sort. The Blackfeet had paid dearly for their victory, and the stubborn resistance they had met had delayed their main body long enough to give John Dean and his

friends time to reach the hills un molested. Of course the lieutenant did not know this; yet he more than half guessed it, and as he lowered his glass from another long look his voice rang out with orders to his men to make all haste.

"Half an hour now will bring us to the pass," he said to Annie, "and then we shall be safe."

"Safe?" Even as he said it, the chill at his heart told him that there could be no safety for her or any of them until they were behind the guns of Fort Berry.

The half hour passed only too rapidly, and every inch of the way the shouting teamsters goaded their straining teams to quicker action. All the while the walls of the sloping valley they were climbing grew steeper and more wildly rugged on either side, until at last they found themselves within the frowning portals of the upper pass of the Black Hills. Then, too, as they turned to look back down the steep and winding ascent, it needed no field glass to discern the swarm of dark, fantastic, threatening figures of the Blackfeet braves who yelled and whooped and charged upon the trail of what they doubtless deemed their sure and easy prey.

"Mr. Dean," said Annie calmly, "do you think we can escape them?"

"We shall see," he replied.

Another minute the little howitzer had unlimbered, and shell after shell went whizzing down the valley, while the train still pressed on.

"Hold up, boys, for a moment!" shouted the lieutenant. "Limber up and follow the wagon. I think, Miss Brown, we have checked them a little, but now I must take a look ahead, for it is long since I have been this way."

On rode the leader, followed by a squad of his men. The pass was growing momentarily more narrow and difficult, but that was in their favor, for

it gave an opportunity for a few men to check an army. The higher the rocks on either hand, and the more closely they drew together, the lighter grew the heart of John Dean. A few minutes' riding brought him out into a wider and more open space, where the perpendicular side walls arose for hundreds of feet around a couple of acres of flat rock which seemed be at the summit of the pass and from which the gorge sloped downward on the eastern side. At the mouth of this, however, the lieutenant paused and listened for a moment; a chorus of strange sounds from below smote louder and clearer upon his ears. He called out to his men:

"They have seized the eastern end of the pass! We are caught in a trap! Quick! We must throw up a barricade!"

When the foremost wagon was drawn into the open space, the lieutenant and his men were already rolling huge fragments of rock across the eastern outlet, to raise a breastwork against any foeman from beyond.

"Quick!" he shouted again. "They will be on us in five minutes."

But the wily savages felt too sure of their prey and knew too well the dangerous character of the pass to be in too great a hurry. There was time enough given for the whole train to pass in and for the howitzer to take its position like a watchdog looking back upon the foes who were to follow. A few cold, stern sentences, even while the lips that uttered them quivered with pity, conveyed Lieutenant Dean's explanations of their new peril to Mrs. Brown and her daughter; and, while the blood in their veins seemed curdling, they could not help admiring the unfaltering soldier who gave them the news.

The very halt of the train told the savages on either side all they wanted to know of each other's position, and their further dispositions for the attack

were speedily made. They were in no hurry, and yet they had no time to lose, for the day was passing and Fort Berry was not so far away.

After a brief breathing space, of which the white men made the best use in their power, the redskin braves, no longer on horseback, came rushing up the ascent toward the frail breastwork of Dean's little company, not charging shoulder to shoulder like trained soldiers, but a horde of yelling, blood-thirsty demons, darting from rock to rock and shelter to shelter, stopping to load and fire, and neutralizing as far as they could the advantages of the white men's position.

Hard-worked was the little howitzer, and the gorges of the hills echoed and reechoed with the varied sounds of the desperate struggle. Again and again the Blackfeet seemed to have all but carried the frail defenses, and as often they were forced to fall back, with greater loss than the red men of the plains will generally stand up under; but Dean's powder-blackened face grew more and more gloomy, even with his success. He had been in the front of every danger, and neither Annie nor her mother had received more than a passing word of encouragement.

"We can't stand much more of this," he muttered; "the ammunition for the howitzer is almost gone, and a good half of us are either killed or wounded."

Even as he spoke, however, a new phase of the singular combat was drawing nearer and nearer.

CHAPTER VI.

A FIERCE STRUGGLE.

TOWARD the eastern end of the pass the cavalry squad, under Captain Montrose, were riding swiftly, already made aware that they were needed by the distant roar of the howitzer, while on the western side of the hills Geary and Ragged Hand already had the val-

ley below the pass, and were pressing steadily upward. Not even yet were the Blackfeet outnumbered, but their desperate position, their unexpected tumble into their own trap, drove them almost mad with wrath and fear.

One rush was made down the valley, and terrible was their collision with Geary's veterans and the Pawnees. A brief, fierce struggle, and then they once more turned to the narrow pass as their only hope. Their fellows on the eastern side had only needed to hear the music of the cavalry bugler before a precisely similar thought and purpose seized upon them, and they, too, in a desperate, panic-stricken mass, came pouring forward upon what remained of Dean's little garrison.

Short was the struggle at the barriers, for the white men were too few, and the Blackfeet charged with the very recklessness of stampeded cattle.

"Back!" shouted the lieutenant. "Back to the wagons!"

The wagons had been drawn up near each other on one side of the open space, and between them, as a place of safety, the women had been stationed. Less than a dozen men were able to obey their leader, and in a jiffy the rocky level swarmed with painted warriors. Dean was puzzled for a moment, for the Blackfeet at first made no attack upon his last forlorn position, but as the two bands met and mingled they shouted to one another with wild and strange gesticulations. That moment was enough, however, and then, with the instinctive ferocity of cornered wolves, the red men turned upon their nearest foes.

Down went soldier after soldier. Twice Dean himself was down, but as often he sprang to his feet again, bleeding and half blind, but resolute. Down, too, were many of the red men, but it was well for Annie Brown and her mother that Geary and the Pawnee chief had followed so closely on the

heels of their first advantage. Annie prepared to meet her fate bravely, while just in front of her Dean was struggling with a Blackfoot brave. One terrible moment, and then, despite the din of battle, she heard her mother's voice crying:

"Annie, look! We are saved!"

Still the rocky open swarmed with yelling and struggling men. White men and red fought madly, but they seemed to have no thought of harming her or her mother. And then she saw them all pouring out together through the eastern outlet of the pass. The few white men left were saved, but that surging tide of flight and pursuit came very near being the destruction of Captain Montrose and his gallant cavalry. The captain made as good a stand as he could and took a heavy toll from the diminished number of the Blackfeet; they seemed to go through, around, over his slender lines, too badly panic-stricken even to be afraid of them. Montrose felt his horse totter and sink under him from a lance thrust of a passing brave, and he came to the ground.

All was over in a flash, as it seemed, and then Montrose pushed forward in breathless haste to seek tidings of the colonel's daughter. It was not long before he obtained even more than he could have hoped for. While the Pawnees went on after scalps, Geary and Montrose, as if with one purpose and one hope, met in front of the wagon in the little rocky arena. There before them was the colonel's wife, and there was Annie herself; but both were kneeling on the ground as if unmindful of any other presence, while upon the lap of the latter there lay the blood-stained head of a man in the uniform of an army officer.

"Mother!" said Annie, her eyes alight with joy. "He is alive!"

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Mrs. Brown.

And when one of the men who had a surgeon's trained eye had examined the lieutenant's wound he pronounced it far from mortal. It proved a sound diagnosis, for in due time Dean himself was able to make a report of the battle in the pass to Colonel Brown. He tried to give Geary and Captain Montrose most of the credit, but they would not have it that way, and Annie joined him in praises of the splendid work done by the rescuers, not forgetting Ragged Hand.

That night, over their pipes at mess, Geary said to Montrose: "Captain, he gave us all the honors of war."

"And that's all we'll get," muttered the other admirer of Miss Brown.

"Oh, no," returned Geary, with a resigned grin. "We'll get an invitation to the wedding."

Got it Literally

AN amusing incident took place the other day in a large railway freight yard. A new man was sent to unload a car and to check the list of contents. He did the work, but forgot to fill in the number of the car in its place on the form.

"Go and get me the number of that car!" shouted the boss angrily.

The man departed, and returned after an absence of half an hour, when he banged down the cast-iron number, wrenched from the side of the wagon, remarking:

"Sure, the next time ye want the number of a car, ye can go for it yerself."

Slight Misunderstanding

A STORY is being told of a couple of tourists in Spain who could not speak the language, and, consequently, had some difficulty in making known their wants.

One day they came to a wayside inn and tried to obtain some meat—roast

beef, for choice. But nobody could understand them.

"What are we to do?" asked one of them despairingly.

"I know!" said the other, a ray of hope appearing. "I'll draw a picture of a cow. Then they'll understand."

He made a rough sketch of a cow, put a "2" beneath it, and handed it to the waiter, who instantly smiled to show that he understood, and went off to execute their order.

A few minutes later he returned with two tickets for a local bullfight!

No Doubt About That

DURING the course of a conversation between two gentlemen, one of them declared that he had been having electric-light baths up to 300 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Come, come, George!" the other protested. "That's rather steep! Why, water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit!"

"But I tell you I've been lying in the electric-light bath with a temperature of 300 degrees," repeated George.

"Well, well," replied his friend, "have it your own way, but, at any rate, you're lying in broad daylight now!"

Just As Ignorant

AND admiral was visiting the navy yard one day when a dispatch was handed to him. His eyes were giving trouble just at that time, and when he fumbled for his eyeglasses he found that he had mislaid them. He held the paper close up to his eyes and then some distance away, but he could not read it either way.

He turned to a sailor of Irish birth who was standing near.

"Read this for me, my man," he said.

The man shook his head. "Oi can't," he replied. "Oim as ignorant as yerself, sorr!"

In The Jitney Class



By John D. Emerson

(A COMPLETE NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

MYSTERY WITH TWO M'S.

WHEN the five o'clock train groaned to a halt before the red-and-white, spick-and-span station at Cuttyville, twelve men stepped from the confines of the cindery day coach and gathered in a knot on the brick-paved platform. Between them there followed much whispering, many askant glances, and a laugh or two. Then, after the train had pulled out and the baggage truck had rattled past, the men moved silently and in close formation across the platform, through the station, and out upon the green-bordered walk that led up to the main street.

"Take you right up to the American House, gentlemen," sang out the alert bus driver, flipping open the door of the cumbersome vehicle and smiling his Cuttyville best. "Take you right to the door for two bits a head, gentlemen."

The gentlemen addressed bestowed indifferent glances upon the solicitor, turned their backs, and continued on their way.

The driver slammed shut the bus door. "A cheap outfit," he remarked in a disgruntled tone.

"Looks like a jury out for supper," said one of the station loungers who had witnessed the humiliating incident.

"Maybe they're a show troupe," another man suggested.

"Naw," the driver replied positively, climbing to his lofty seat and preparing to pilot his empty craft back to the hotel. "Tain't no show troupe. There ain't no women with 'em."

Questioning stares followed the twelve men as they proceeded along the main street. In front of the hotel they paused, as if by some preconcerted signal. Then the leader of the crowd swung abruptly on his heel and strode into the lobby, the other eleven following him in single file.

The chair warmers in the lobby were instantly galvanized into life. The bell boys jumped to attention. The clerk looked up through his glasses, extended an inked pen, and reversed the register.

One after another the men attached their signatures to the ink-spattered page, then stepped silently aside and

looked to their leader to make the first move.

"How many rooms, Mr.—Vance?" the clerk inquired, glancing at the first man on the list and taking it for granted that the man addressed was in charge of the party.

"Three large rooms, please," answered Mr. Vance, "with two double beds in each."

The clerk nodded. "I can fix you up comfortably. Front, boy! How about your baggage?" he added.

"Everything is at the station. Here are the checks. Kindly have it brought up at once."

"Right away, Mr. Vance." The clerk, turning toward his key rack, was visibly impressed by the prospective guest's voice and manner. "Going to be with us for some time?"

Vance flashed a quick and significant glance toward his companions, and checked what might have been a smile. "Not if I can help it!" he declared.

The clerk laughed, merely to be agreeable. "Oh, I don't know. Cuttyville isn't so bad. I've been here for ten years."

The twelve men, in charge of the two bell boys who comprised the entire staff, ascended the broad, carpeted stairs and were lost to view of the interested audience in the lobby. At once there was a rush to inspect the register. The names were hurriedly scanned, repeated, and speculated upon.

"Who are they, Kohler?" came from several lips at once.

"Don't know," the clerk returned shortly, "but they're smart-looking boys, and them's the kind we like to cater to."

"Huh!" put in a hatchet-faced chap. "You'd better be sure they've got enough to pay for their keep. If I was you——"

"We'll do all the worrying," Kohler interrupted.

An hour later the baggage arrived

and was taken to the rooms. Following that event, the new guests came down into the lobby, singly and in pairs. They exchanged no words except among themselves. Several of them hesitated in front of the cigar counter and gazed hungrily at the wares displayed; then passed on. This unexpected behavior brought a frown to the face of the news-stand clerk.

"What do you know about that?" he muttered. "Not even a picture post card or a Chicago paper wanted."

The editor of the Cuttyville *Bugle*, who always managed to be on the job when anything of interest was breaking, trailed Vance persistently. Finally he cornered his quarry.

"I represent the *Bugle*, Mr. Vance," he began pleasantly. "Anything you'd like to say?"

Vance broke away quickly, his face clouding. "Nothing to say, thank you."

"You and your associates intend to remain in Cuttyville? Here on business, are you? What line?"

Vance continued to back away. "Nothing to say," he repeated. "Nothing at all."

"But surely, Mr. Vance——"

"When I want to talk for publication I'll let you know," Vance interrupted.

"Queer duck," muttered the editor as his prey escaped him. "What's he up to, I wonder? What can he and eleven other chaps want in Cuttyville?"

A bell rang loudly. The head waitress, in freshly starched linen, opened the big doors of the dining room and put out a bowl of toothpicks. She was nearly swept off her feet in the rush that followed. The twelve new arrivals were not among the last to engage in the assault.

The editor looked on and smiled. "Guess Vance was too hungry to talk," he observed. "I'll wait. Maybe after supper he'll loosen up."

Herman Wingfield, proprietor of the

hotel, came in at that moment and walked behind the desk. His sharp eyes alighted upon the register.

"All in from the evening train, Kohler?" he inquired.

The clerk nodded. "Yes—the whole twelve."

"Any baggage?"

"No trunks—only suit cases and grips."

"They can't be show people," Wingfield said. "The opera house is closed for the summer."

"I didn't think so either." Kohler returned, "until I saw the rush they made for the dining room."

This comedy line was lost upon the proprietor of the American House. He took down the pass-key and started away. "I'll go up and look things over," he said, unable to restrain his curiosity.

He came down the stairs a few minutes later, still puzzled.

"What did you find?" asked Kohler.

"There's not much else in their baggage except a lot of baseball fixings," the proprietor announced.

"Baseball?" echoed the astonished clerk. "Well, I want to know!"

"Baseball?" echoed one other, who was leaning over the desk at the time and who overheard. "Well, I guessed as much."

Kohler turned to face the speaker—Scanlon. Scanlon had arrived at the hotel the day before. His business was unknown. He was a stocky, square-shouldered, ruddy-faced individual who wore a fancy waistcoat and a big diamond in his shirt front.

"Know any of the men, Mr. Scanlon?" the proprietor inquired.

"Haven't had a good look at them yet," Scanlon replied; "but more than likely I do. I spotted them for baseball chaps the minute they came into the lobby."

"What do you suppose they are doing here?"

"Can't say. Maybe on their way East, stopping off in Cuttyville for a rest."

"But they haven't much baggage—" began Wingfield.

"Oh, probably their trunks went straight through," Scanlon said.

"I guess that's just about what happened," agreed the proprietor of the American House.

Scanlon waited until he could speak with the proprietor alone. He found his opportunity half an hour later, when the clerk went in to supper.

"You say you found a lot of baseball uniforms, Wingfield?" he inquired.

"Plenty of them."

"What color?"

"A sort of dark red."

"Did you notice any lettering on them?"

"Yes. Big white letters—M. M."

Scanlon drew in a quick breath, and his eyes twinkled. "Two M's, eh? By Jove!"

Wingfield looked up swiftly. "What do you mean?" he inquired.

"I'll tell you later on," said Scanlon, and walked hurriedly away.

Wingfield stared after him; then slowly shook his head, and turned his attention to his books.

CHAPTER II.

GUESSES AND HINTS.

KOHLER, the clerk, on his way from the desk to the dining room, let fall the first hint. By the time he had taken up his usual position at the table nearest the door, every one in the lobby and half the occupants of the dining room heard the report.

The news traveled with miraculous speed. The magic word—baseball—found an echo in almost every Cuttyville heart, for Cuttyville, it must be known, in proportion to its population,

had New York lashed to the mast when it came to baseball.

The local team, picked from the representative firms of the town, played every Saturday afternoon—played and invariably won. Not a team in all the surrounding territory could hold a candle to the Cuttyville aggregation in hitting, base running, and fielding. For three successive years they had won the Wayne County championship. In the loyal eyes of the local fans the Colts, as they were affectionately termed, were on a par with any organization in the big leagues. There was but one regret—a regret long before expressed by a Mr. Alexander: The Colts had no more worlds to conquer.

Out of the hotel the rumor drifted. It winged a course up and down the streets as swiftly and as surely as the wireless. An unknown ball team, undoubtedly professionals, had come in on the five o'clock train and was quartered at the American House. Who they were and what they were doing or intended to do in Cuttyville remained a mystery. Yet it was just that one touch of mystery that made the situation all the more interesting.

Not one of the members would be interviewed. They smiled pleasantly enough, and were ready to talk upon any subject—except one. They were willing to admit that the weather was fine, that Cuttyville had a future, that the railroad station was attractive, and that the war in Europe was a bad thing, but they refused to talk baseball.

The editor of the *Bugle* remained hopefully in the lobby, trusting to hear a word that would give his paper an interesting paragraph. But the word he listened for did not materialize. The twelve attractive men might as well have been deaf and dumb for all the news they imparted. The rumors persisted, but they were yet to be verified. Like most editors—popular opinion to

the contrary—he wanted to be sure of his ground before printing his story.

The clerk at the cigar stand, among the first to hear the report, beckoned to a friend and confided in him. "I'm wise now," he said sagely. "The boys are in training—that's why they are not smoking."

The friend nodded. "You're just about right."

"Wonder if they are a big team?"

"The names on the register aren't familiar to me," the other returned, "and I've heard of all the big-league fellows."

The clerk's right eyelid drooped meaningly. "That's to be expected," he said. "These fellows have stopped off here for a little rest, and they don't want to be annoyed. They haven't signed their own names."

The friend nodded again. "There's a whole lot in that, too," he admitted. "I wish I knew for sure."

Scanlon, smoking his second cigar, his hands deep in his pockets and displaying his fancy waistcoat to the best advantage, eyed the twelve men narrowly as they strolled out of the dining room. Then he singled out Vance, who appeared to be in charge of the unknowns, and tried to strike up a conversation.

"Your crowd looks mighty familiar to me," he began. "What brought you to this burg?"

Vance gave the speaker a careful and critical inspection. "I don't exactly understand you," he said. "You mean—we've met before now?"

"You've got the whole town guessing," Scanlon remarked. "Cuttyville is crazy about baseball. I suppose you know that."

"It's a great game," Vance replied, with a smile.

Scanlon chuckled. "Say, you're a grand little kidder, you are! Better be careful or you'll be telling me your real

name. What are you up to? Why all the mystery?"

Vance gazed straight at the diamond in the other's shirt front. "The mystery seems to be all on your part, my friend," he said evasively.

"Oh, come now!" protested Scanlon. "You can fool some of these Cuttyville sports, but I hail from somewhere east of Ohio. I've seen you before and all your bunch as well. What's in the wind?"

"That's just what I would like to find out," Vance returned quickly; "and when you've found out let me know, will you?"

Vance walked away, and Scanlon did not attempt to follow him. He remained in the center of the lobby, rocking up and down on his heels and toes, his forehead wrinkled. Suddenly his frown cleared, his teeth set grimly upon his half-smoked cigar.

"M. M.," he repeated over to himself, remembering the letters the hotel proprietor had found upon the baseball uniforms. "Great guns! Why didn't I think of it before?"

An instant later he sidled up to the cigar stand, where the clerk was in eager conversation with the editor of the *Bugle*. "There's something stirring in Cuttyville, all right," he announced, "when Murphy's Marauders stop off."

"What's that?" exclaimed the editor sharply, whirling to face the speaker. "Murphy's Marauders? That bunch?"

"Surest thing you know," answered Scanlon. "I've just been talking to Murphy. Of course he didn't own up in so many words—but I was on."

The astounded clerk gasped, and his eyes widened. "Is that a fact?" he asked. "Are you sure?"

"I piped 'em off when they came up the street to-day," Scanlon went on easily. "Knew 'em right away. I saw the bunch in action one day last month

in Omaha. They're a scrappy crowd, all right."

The editor pushed back his hat and mopped his forehead. He was well acquainted with the marvelous exploits of the Marauders—as was every one who followed the baseball columns in the Middle West papers.

Murphy's team was an aggregation of free-lance players, many of them contract jumpers from organized baseball. They had been giving exhibitions through the Mississippi Valley States, on their way to Florida, where a winter schedule was booked. Their spectacular playing, their phenomenal tricks, and their slashing, winning stride were as familiar—on paper—to the fans of Cuttyville as the signboards on Main Street.

"That's straight, is it?" the editor inquired at last as the shock wore off and he recovered his voice.

"Straight as a ruler," Scanlon declared. "The dope will be out to-morrow. Wait and see. I don't know why Murphy is keeping things under cover—something unusual for him. He has always been a great publicity booster, you know. That's what made his bunch famous. He loves printer's ink. Every week or two he digs into organized baseball and tells a few of the big managers where they can get off. The sporting editors are always willing to give him a notice, from a stickful to a spread head. I don't know what's come over him all of a sudden. He's tighter than a clam. When I mentioned baseball just a minute ago he gave me the baby stare."

"Looks as if he wanted to lay low for some reason or other," remarked the clerk. "Maybe some of his baseball enemies——"

"Murphy isn't afraid of his enemies," promptly declared Scanlon. "He'll give them a fight anywhere and at any time. He's a clean, steady chap, Murphy is, and as fair-minded as you make 'em.

I'll bet you any one of the big-league managers would like to sign him. He pitched for the Browns, you know, three years ago. Then his arm went lame, and he took to umpiring with the outlaws on the Pacific coast. Of course that queered him in the East."

"I believe they're booked to play a game in Bedford some time next week," said the editor. Bedford was two hundred miles south of Cuttyville. "Some of the boys intend to run down and take in the fun."

"That's right," said Scanlon. "I'd forgotten all about it. They're booked for Bedford next Tuesday."

"I would like to be sure about these chaps," the editor said, after a pause. "It would make an interesting story."

"A crackajack!" Scanlon exclaimed. "Mysterious ball players arrive in Cuttyville! Refuse to be interviewed! Supposed to be Murphy's Marauders! It'll be a corker!"

"But there's nothing certain——" began the editor.

"Take my word for it," Scanlon broke in. "I know. These twelve chaps are Murphy's crowd. That's as certain as I'm standing here. I'm giving it to you straight."

CHAPTER III.

A DOZEN REASONS WHY.

ON the following morning several interesting things came to pass. The Cuttyville *Bugle*, on the streets at seven o'clock, backed up all the rumors that had been afloat the night before. And while the paragraph, displayed prominently on the first page, next to Gordon's Pool Room advertisement, was a trifle vague and noncommittal and left the readers to form their own conclusions, the questions advanced were not difficult to solve.

Scanlon, down in the lobby before eight o'clock, read the item through with a chuckle. "That editor knows his business, all right," he observed.

The paragraph, headed "Sport Notes," read:

Among yesterday's arrivals at the American House was a bunch of twelve stalwart young men, in charge of Mr. Vance. Considerable mystery surrounds them, and rumors are plentiful. Mr. Vance refused to give the representative of the *Bugle* any information. One of the bell boys at the hotel, however, discovered a number of baseball uniforms in the rooms occupied by the strangers. The uniforms were dark red, and bore the letters M. M. on the shirts. What these letters stand for in the realm of baseball is only too well known to sport fans.

The hotel lobby was thronged that morning, and so was the street in front of the house. The head waitress and the smiling girls in her charge were more than pleasant to the twelve hungry strangers who came down to breakfast at nine o'clock. The fact that they left no tips did not condemn them.

When Vance came out of the dining room and looked about him, he frowned quickly and edged his way to the desk. "What's all the excitement this morning?" he asked of Kohler.

The clerk merely grinned.

"Something unusual going on in town?" Vance continued.

"Yes, sir," Kohler admitted; "something very unusual. Anything I can do for you, sir?"

Vance was on the point of asking another question when Mr. Wingfield, proprietor of the hotel, stepped into view.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Vance!" he cried, extending his hand and smiling cordially. "I hope you rested well. Rooms O. K., are they? If not, I'll change them right away."

"Everything's all right, thank you," Vance replied. "I was just inquiring of the clerk as to the nature of the excitement. He said——"

Wingfield interrupted with a laugh. "You can't blame the boys," he declared. "Cuttyville is a great baseball town—for its size."

Vance turned away. A crowd of chattering, inquisitive boys were lined up before the lobby windows, peering through and making shrill comments until forced to retreat by the hotel porter armed with a hose.

Scanlon, who had not allowed Vance out of his sight, pushed his way through the crowd. Vance had just turned toward the rear stairway, intent upon reaching his room.

"Just a minute, Mr. Vance," Scanlon began, tapping the other's shoulder.

Vance looked around to behold his inquisitor of the previous night. His face clouded. "What do you want?" he asked rather curtly.

"You gave me to understand last night that if I found out what was in the wind—that was the exact expression, I believe—I was to impart the information to you. Am I right?"

"I said something to that effect," Vance replied slowly.

"If you'll give me five minutes of your time, I'll explain," Scanlon said. "I'm sure you'll be interested."

"Go ahead. I'm listening."

"Not here," Scanlon hurriedly protested. "I don't want to take the whole lobby into my confidence. Suppose you come up to my room. It's just at the head of the stairs."

Vance hesitated a minute. "Is the matter of such importance?"

"To you, yes," Scanlon returned. "And to your advantage as well."

"Since you put it that way," Vance answered, "I'm interested."

Scanlon started up the stairs, Vance following him. Once inside the room, Scanlon motioned his guest to be seated, while he stepped over to the window and pulled up the shade. Vance sank into the chair nearest the door and waited expectantly. Scanlon thrust his hands deep into his trouser pockets and faced the younger man with a widening smile.

"Vance," he said at last, "I take it that the minstrel business is on the decline. Am I right?"

Vance was taken by surprise. "How did you reach that conclusion?" he asked.

"Well, I told you last night that your bunch looked mighty familiar to me, didn't I? I couldn't place you just then. But the whole thing is perfectly clear to me now. Last week—Friday to be exact—I saw you and your company parading up Main Street in Beacon Center, dressed in long red coats and white high hats. Get me?"

Vance nodded. "Go on."

"I also witnessed the little entertainment you pulled off in the opera house that same night. The Mammoth Metropolitan Minstrels! Three special cars! A hundred people! Six end men!" Scanlon laughed. "You'll pardon me, Vance; but the show was pretty punk! That old gag about the chicken crossing the street, for instance——"

"I didn't come here to listen to criticism of past performances," Vance interposed sharply. "The Metropolitan Minstrels have met with hard luck, its members are now at liberty, and the one thing we are hoping for——"

"Is to get back to New York," Scanlon broke in. "That's it, isn't it, Vance?"

Vance nodded. "Exactly."

"Where is your baggage and scenery?"

"Ask the proprietor of the opera house in Mason City. He attached almost everything two nights ago. We managed to get away with our first-act costumes and our street clothes."

Scanlon smiled sympathetically. "I understand. I know just how you feel, too. Why, I used to be in the business myself—burlesque was my line. That's why I'm going to help you fellows. I'm going to put you on the soft cushions and send you back to the white lights. What'll it cost?"

"The fare from here to New York is eighteen dollars," Vance said. "Multiply that by twelve and you have the answer."

"Two hundred and sixteen dollars," announced Scanlon, doing a bit of mental arithmetic, "not counting sleepers or meals."

It was Vance who smiled now. "A day coach and a sandwich or two," he suggested. "That's plenty. I wouldn't know how to behave in a Pullman."

"Bad as all that? Well, you must have had a beautiful season."

"Some one told me that summer minstrels would make a hit in this section of the country," said Vance.

"Whoever it was deserves to be shot at sunrise," was Scanlon's rejoinder. "About all the inhabitants in this section care for, at the present time, is baseball."

"I suspected as much," confessed Vance. "That's why I used a grandstand drop in the first act, and rigged the company out in baseball togs. Wanted to have a novelty. Then I tried to work up some interest and advertising by organizing a team and playing the local boys in the towns we showed in. The people came to the games all right enough, but they didn't come to the theater."

Scanlon nodded. "You should have reversed the order of things. You should have given your minstrel show to advertise your ball games. That would get 'em. Do you know, Vance," he added seriously now, "what's happened in Cuttyville since you and your crowd registered at this hotel?"

"I can imagine what will happen if we can't arrange some kind of an entertainment to square our hotel bill," Vance replied gloomily.

"So that's what you intended to do, is it?"

"I was about to break the news gently to the proprietor this morning. I was too tired and hungry last night to take

a chance of being turned down. I warned all the men to keep mum until I could get a line on the situation."

"Well, the situation has made itself, Vance," Scanlon declared, "and you've tumbled into the finest sort of a welcome. By this time next week you'll be back on Broadway warming the chairs in the booking offices. Just read this." And Scanlon thrust a copy of the *Bugle* into the actor-manager's hands.

Vance read the paragraph through twice before he looked up; then he smiled. But Scanlon gave him no time to speak.

"It's the luckiest thing that ever happened to you, Vance," he cried. "Your bunch has been spotted for a baseball outfit—and Murphy's team at that. Now it's up to you to take advantage of the mistake and pick up enough coin to take you out of town."

"So that is why every one in the lobby talked baseball to me, is it? I couldn't understand at first."

"Well, you do now," Scanlon returned. "I've boosted things along. I've done the press-agent stuff to a fare-you-well. I tipped off the editor of the *Bugle* and helped matters along with the proprietor of the hotel. All you and your crowd have to do now is to look wise and say nothing. The more mysterious you act, the better it will go."

"I suppose the finding of those baseball uniforms in our hand baggage started the ball rolling," said Vance.

"It certainly did," Scanlon replied, with a chuckle. "You see, the letters M. M. stand for Murphy's Marauders as well as Metropolitan Minstrels."

"I've heard a great deal concerning the Marauders," Vance admitted, after a pause. "Pretty good team, aren't they?"

"Good? Why, they're immense! The greatest bunch of outlaws in the business."

"Then you suggest that we pose as the Marauders, play the local team, and use our share of the gate receipts to carry us back to New York. That's your proposition, isn't it?"

"Exactly," said Scanlon, beaming.

CHAPTER IV.

MUM'S THE WORD.

VANCE shook his head dubiously.

"I don't know about that," he remarked, without the enthusiasm the other had expected. "The playing of the ball game is all right, but to represent ourselves as the Marauders, when we are not, isn't just the proposition to appeal to me."

"Oh, forget the proprieties! You're after the coin. This is no time to split hairs."

"We need the money," Vance said quietly, "but we must raise it legitimately. I appreciate the spirit in which the suggestion was made," he went on; "please remember that. Your plan sounds attractive and feasible—until one stops to analyze it."

"Where's the flaw in it?"

"We're not ball players, to begin with, and the local players are. When it comes to baseball, we're in the jitney class. They'd show us up before the game was half over."

"Show you up?" scoffed the other. "Say, who do you think you're to play? The Athletics? The Boston Braves? Rubbish! You're going up against the Cuttyville Colts, and they're a typical bunch of small-town bushers. Now you fellows have been playing a few games this summer, haven't you? You're in fair trim. You can put up a decent scrap. And it doesn't make any difference whether you win or lose or draw—half of the gate receipts are yours just the same. It's a sure thing, any way you want to look at it."

"We did put up some scrappy ball this summer," said Vance, his eyes

kindling. "Most of the boys are fair players. Fact is, they would rather play ball than eat. I've been twirling for the crowd. There's nothing phenomenal in my delivery, of course, but—"

"That's the spirit!" Scanlon broke in. "Show 'em what you've got. You've nothing to be afraid of, Vance. You won't come right out and say you're Murphy, or that your bunch are the Marauders; but every one in town will take it for granted. The rumor has taken hold, and it won't be downed. It's up to you to look wise and let the crowd form their own conclusions. You can play under some other name. Call yourselves the Reds, if you want. The more mystery the better. The gate receipts ought to total a thousand dollars at the very least—and five hundred of it will be in your pocket an hour after the game is over. And say, Vance," he added, lowering his voice, "won't those lights in Times Square look good to you?"

Vance drew in a quick breath. For three months he and his companions had been wildcatting through the one-night stands of the Middle West, fighting for time, parading, giving concerts, hanging their own stuff, sleeping in day coaches, when they slept at all, and eating from lunch counters when they were fortunate enough to have the wherewithal. And as a reward for the hardships and the hundred nights of expectation, the sheriff had appeared upon the scene—as sheriffs are in the habit of doing.

Vance himself, by pawning a ring, had defrayed the expenses of the defunct minstrel company from Mason City to Cuttyville, in hope that the latter town would be more kindly disposed toward a benefit performance. In view of that he had put up at the hotel, and intended to have a heart-to-heart talk with the proprietor after a night's rest and a square meal.

"I'm in sympathy with you chaps," Scanlon went on earnestly. "I know what it means to be stranded a thousand miles from New York. That is the reason I'm ready to help you along. Guess I forgot to introduce myself, didn't I? You'll pardon me. My name's Scanlon, and I hail from somewhere north of Thirty-fourth Street."

"My name's Vance, as you already know," the actor responded, completing the delayed introduction, "from the same district."

"Well, what have you got to say?"

"Do you think the local boys would play with us?" said Vance absently, his mind still dwelling on the question of whether he would lend himself to the deception that Scanlon had proposed.

"Would you accept thirty weeks on Broadway? Why, say, Vance, these Cuttyville Colts will be delirious with joy at the mere prospect of meeting your crowd. They're a cocksure, chesty crowd, and because they've licked a few of their bush-league rivals they think they can clean up anything that wears a uniform. And as for the inhabitants —take it from me, Vance, they'll pawn their shoes to get into the bleachers. Forget the ifs, ands, and buts! Put the proposition up to the other boys, won't you? Just see how they take it."

Vance allowed himself to be won over on that point, and within ten minutes after the word had been passed around, the eleven wondering members of the late Metropolitan Minstrels gathered in Vance's room. There Scanlon explained his plan in very few words.

"It's the chance of a lifetime, boys," he finished, "and I'm with you to the last. If the game goes on to-morrow afternoon—Saturday—you will have the rest of to-day and to-morrow morning to limber up in. That's time enough, isn't it?"

"Plenty," chorused several voices at once. The decision of the eleven men was never in doubt from that time on.

The mere thought of getting back to New York blinded them to everything else. Vance listened to their shouts in silence.

"What about our side props?" one of the men broke in suddenly. "We haven't a glove or bat——"

"The Colts will be tickled to death to accommodate you," Scanlon interrupted, smiling.

Bayley, who was the featured end man of the company—when it was in existence—and who formed the receiving end of the battery with Vance, when the company was displaying its baseball talents, executed a jig, taking it for granted, of course, that the actor-manager was in favor of the proposed match.

"Bring on the Colts!" he cried. "We'll break them to harness. Vance and I will have them eating out of our hands before the third inning. We're no good actors, but we're *some* battery."

Aldred, who had been the Metropolitan Minstrels' leading tenor, who doubled in brass without a whimper, and who held down the initial sack on the team, broke in with a query: "You fellows don't think you've a chance to win this game, do you?"

"We should worry!" returned Bayley.

"Win or lose, you all go back to Broadway," chimed in Scanlon. "That's the thing that counts."

"Wonder if the old street is still there?"

"I'll take a chance on finding it if I get back," said Lynch.

"I'm as well off here as in New York," gloomily declared Keen, once billed as the most marvelous basso in minstrel-dom.

"We'll leave you here, if you feel like that," said Bayley.

"Oh, see the pretty lights, boys!" Lynch broke in. "Can't you just see

'em twinkling? Can't you sniff the fragrance of the dear old subway?"

The crowd laughed. Scanlon joined in the levity. "Nice soft Pullman cushions all the way to Jersey City, boys. Are you for 'em?"

"Foolish question number nine hundred and thirty," cried Conner, soft-shoe dancer, comedian, and second baseman.

"All right," Scanlon returned. "We'll start the ball a rolling. We've no time to lose. You boys had better scatter and keep mum. Your manager will do all the talking necessary. See you later."

He hurried out of the room and down the hall before Vance, who was standing thoughtfully at the window, could call to him.

CHAPTER V.

TIPPING OFF CUTTYVILLE.

WEARING the smile of a man to whom all the world is rosy, Scanlon slipped down the rear stairs, pushed his way into the American House bar, treated himself to a liberal drink, exchanged a word or two with the refreshment dispenser in regard to the baseball situation—not forgetting to bring in a reference to Murphy's Marauders—stepped out again into the lobby, and made his way toward the desk, where Wingfield was on duty.

"Quite lively around here this morning, isn't it?" he began, leaning back against the desk and burying his hands in his pockets. "Looks like a real hotel. It surely does."

Wingfield looked across the lobby and smiled. "You've heard the news, haven't you? That crowd upstairs is Murphy's team."

Scanlon eyed him speculatively. "How did you find it out?" he asked, with marked emphasis on the pronoun.

"Oh, I'm not blind. I knew all along they were baseball chaps, but I couldn't

understand why they were stopping off here and why they didn't want to be recognized. I'm still guessing."

"Murphy's a queer duck," observed Scanlon. "There's no telling what's up his sleeve."

"Well, he might as well own up now," Wingfield replied. "We know who he is. He couldn't fool the Cuttyville people."

Scanlon grinned admiringly. "I guess you're right. You've got a pretty wise bunch in this town. Nothing gets past them, eh? I only hope Murphy doesn't blame me for—"

"Blame you?" Wingfield interrupted. "What do you mean by that?"

Scanlon looked chagrined and cleared his throat embarrassedly. It was a successful bit of acting for an amateur, and it had the desired effect upon the interested and unsuspecting hotel proprietor.

"I—I really didn't mean to let that slip," Scanlon said, confused. "But I'm a poor hand at keeping secrets. Don't give me away now, Wingfield," he hurried on. "If Murphy knew this he would throw a fit. Fact of the matter is, I spotted him last night and recognized him in a minute. I've met him before, you know, while he was with the St. Louis Browns. He got me to one side and swore me to secrecy. He and his crowd are stopping off here for a few days. There seems to be some sort of mix-up in their schedule—I don't know exactly what it is—but until the affair is adjusted he intends to lie low in Cuttyville."

The explanation, vague and halting as it was, appeared to satisfy Wingfield. He nodded. "I understand," he said. "Of course Murphy doesn't want it generally known that he is stopping here."

"Not on your life! It might spell trouble for him. Of course, a few of the localities are wise, but Murphy isn't giving them any satisfaction."

"How long do you think he'll stay?"

"Until Monday. I gathered that much from his conversation last night. I suppose he'll shoot right down to Bedford from here."

Wingfield was silent a moment, apparently lost in thought. Then he suddenly leaned over and touched Scanlon's shoulder. "I wonder," he broke out, "if Murphy would play a game with the Colts?"

Scanlon's surprise was genuine. He had expected to lead up to this proposition gradually, never believing that Wingfield would make the first advance. But now that the unexpected had come to pass, Scanlon skipped the preliminaries. "You mean play here in Cuttyville?" he asked.

"Yes, to-morrow afternoon. We can draw at least fifteen hundred people. I could guarantee Murphy five or six hundred dollars."

Scanlon pursed his lips and rubbed his chin. "I don't know about that," he replied slowly. "You see, the Marauders are to play in Bedford on Tuesday, and the principals down there might kick. They're counting on a big Cuttyville delegation at the game, you know, and if the team appears here it would cut into the Bedford receipts. I understand that the Bedford crowd has put up a guarantee of a thousand dollars—so it would be mighty poor policy for Murphy to show here for half that amount."

"I didn't think of that," Wingfield said.

"But look here," Scanlon went on quickly. "The idea is too good to pass by. Possibly you could arrange with Murphy to play you under some other name. Understand? Instead of the Marauders, it could be the Reds. It would be all the same to you. The crowd is wise."

"Do you think he would agree to that plan?" Wingfield asked hopefully.

"Go up and tackle him," urged Scan-

lon. "He might be willing, under the circumstances, to pick up five hundred dollars. Baseball managers are only human, you know. And so long as it wouldn't get him in bad with the Bedford crowd—" Scanlon broke off with a wink. "See what I mean?"

"By George! I'll do that!" declared Wingfield.

"For Heaven's sake don't let on that I've tipped you off," warned Scanlon. "I'm not to be mentioned in the deal. Understand?"

"You leave that to me. I won't get you in dutch. Say," the manager ran on enthusiastically, "a game with that bunch will be the talk of the town. Of course it is likely to be one-sided, and we won't stand much of a chance against them, but we'll show 'em the best we have."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Scanlon put in. "Even the best of the teams crack now and then. The Marauders have cleaned up everything in this section of the country, but there's no telling when they're due to hit the toboggan."

Five minutes after Scanlon had delivered that remark and had moved away, Wingfield hurried up to Vance's room. Once he had been asked to enter, he quickly introduced himself and proceeded to explain the nature of his business by stating his proposition clearly and briefly. The local team, of which he was the business manager, had an open date for Saturday afternoon. Would Vance's nine care to fill in for a guarantee of five hundred dollars?

Vance listened respectfully. "My nine?" he repeated, frowning. "I don't quite understand. I'm afraid you are mistaken, Mr. Wingfield. I'm not managing a ball team."

Wingfield smiled—a very sly and knowing smile. "Oh, that's all right," he protested quickly. "I'm not saying you are a manager. But I am under the impression"—and he glanced sig-

nificantly at the red uniforms upon the bed—"that you and your companions do play ball occasionally."

"So we do—occasionally," admitted Vance. "I can't very well deny that. The evidence is before you. But—"

"Isn't the inducement liberal enough?"

"Oh, it isn't the inducement," Vance replied. "What puzzles me is that you should name so large a sum. We're not professionals, you know. Do you think our appearance is worth five hundred dollars?"

"I'll take the chance," Wingfield said.

Vance leaned forward in his chair, and the smile that had touched his lips vanished. "I hate to spoil your illusions, Mr. Wingfield," he began quietly, "and I'm not mean enough to take advantage of your error. There are certain unfounded rumors afloat—you know what they are—relative to the identity of my companions and myself. There was also a paragraph in this morning's paper, which, to say the least, was absolutely absurd. I'm afraid you've been impressed by all of this, and—"

"The reports have not influenced me in the slightest," the manager protested hurriedly.

"In that case," returned Vance, "I might agree to play. I do not care to make trouble for either of us. I don't want you to be placed in a false light, and I certainly do not want to enter a contest—to put it literally—wearing another man's colors."

Once more Wingfield smiled. "I understand exactly, Mr. Vance. You can be known as the Reds. Is that agreeable?"

Vance nodded. "And the guarantee—we'll not consider that," he said. "I think it would be better to share equally in the gate receipts, whether they amount to ten dollars or ten hundred."

"Just as you say, Mr. Vance."

"We have your permission to use the

grounds this afternoon?" Vance went on to ask. "We need a little warming up."

"The field is at your disposal."

"Thank you, Mr. Wingfield. Then we will consider the matter settled. It is to be the Reds against the Colts."

"The Reds against the Colts," Wingfield repeated, his eyes sparkling. "That is it exactly, Mr. Vance."

When the manager of the Cuttyville Colts had departed, the door of the adjoining room was flung open and half a dozen ex-members of the minstrel troupe, who had overheard most of the conversation between Vance and the hotel proprietor, raced in. They joined hands, and executed a war dance upon the dingy Brussels carpet. To them, Broadway was just around the corner.

Meanwhile, Wingfield, bubbling over with enthusiasm, descended to the lobby, where the first to greet him was Scanlon.

"Well?" Scanlon broke forth. "What luck?"

"The Colts will face the Reds tomorrow afternoon," announced Wingfield.

"Say, that's immense!" Scanlon cried. "Simply immense!"

Wingfield hurried on to spread the news. Scanlon slipped away to the telegraph office, where he composed, and handed to the operator, a short, queerly worded message. It read:

HENRY Tabor, Hotel Harvey, Glen Falls.
Cherries are ripe. Join me at once.

SCANLON.

CHAPTER VI.

MINSTREL MANEUVERS.

THERE was no mistaking the Cuttyville attitude toward the coming contest. Once it had become generally known that the mysterious and uncommunicative crowd at the American House was to cross bats with the Colts on Saturday afternoon, all fandom was agog. Excitement ran at fever heat.

The usual Saturday games, where the Colts met the rank and file of the county leaguers, was something to look forward to; but the mere prospect of seeing the Reds in action was an occasion to excite even the feminine minority. It was slated to be an epoch in Cuttyville's baseball history.

Of course, every one knew—just as positively as Wingfield himself knew—who the Reds really were. Murphy, who persisted in the name of Vance, for all his bluffing and pretended ignorance, could not pull the wool over Cuttyville eyes, no matter how desperately he tried. But so long as the manager had insisted upon rechristening his team, the fans were agreeable. For all they cared he might have called his outfit the Pinks or the Blues. After all, what mattered? What was in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, as they often had heard, and the Marauders called by any other name, would play ball just as brilliantly.

In one respect, however, the approaching game was without precedent. Cuttyville money was shy. The fans were not disloyal, and up to a certain point maintained perfect confidence in their team. Previous to this they had backed their aggregation heavily and persistently, and had never cause for regret. But on this occasion the prospect for a victory was not alluring enough to coax the silver dollars out of hiding. The Marauders were too big, too strong, too able. The Colts would give them a good fight, of course, but the result was hardly to be questioned.

Vance and his men went out to the ball park that afternoon, locked the gates behind them, and proceeded to work the knots out of their muscles. The men were all in high humor, and displayed remarkable dash and enthusiasm in the warming-up process. Vance was surprised as well as gratified.

"There's one thing sure," he observed, after the men had slammed his easy throws to all four corners of the field, "you fellows can play ball better than you can act."

"Which isn't saying very much," remarked Aldred.

"Oh, we'll give these Colts a scrap, all right," Bayley declared. "It isn't going to be a walk-over for them."

"It had better not be a walk-over," Vance replied. "Otherwise the crowd will want their money back."

"If they do it'll be over my dead body," Bayley remarked grimly, with visions of Times Square dancing before his eyes.

"It all depends upon you, Vance," Lynch spoke up. "If they hit you hard in the beginning, it'll be all over. You can't count on brilliant support from us; that is, unless you provide us with baskets. We're likely to let a few swift ones through us."

After Vance had framed up a new batting order, to the satisfaction of all concerned, he put his companions through a brisk fielding practice, laying down easy bunts for the infield to pick up and lifting out high ones for the garden men to get under. He kept the men busy until the button-factory siren began an unearthly screech, giving all the countryside notice that five o'clock had arrived. The ex-minstrels changed into their street clothes and hurried hotelward.

That night, while the hotel lobby was buzzing with comment and speculation over the coming game, Scanlon was seen in earnest conversation with a slim, well-dressed stranger, who had appeared on the scene at four o'clock and who had registered as Henry Tabor, of Glen Falls.

Saturday morning saw another long practice for the leg-weary and arm-sore ex-minstrels, and persistent coaching from Vance, who was greatly elated over the behavior of his men. While

he was not counting upon a victory over the locals, he hoped to give them a fight in every one of the nine innings. He knew his men would be under a constant and critical survey from the moment they appeared upon the field, and that a great deal would be expected from them. If they fell down in the beginning, or blew up before the seventh, the crowd would first begin to wonder, then to suspect, and that would mean trouble.

At one-thirty the Main Street section of Cuttyville was deserted, but the ball park resembled a miniature polo grounds during the deciding game of a world's series. Fifteen hundred fans crowded into the wooden stands that were never meant to hold a thousand. The band from the button factory played incessantly, if not melodiously.

The Reds, with Vance at their head, trotted across the field from the clubhouse, to be greeted with cheers and applause. They began their batting practice and the crowd settled down to watch them closely.

As the Colts appeared and went in to take their turn at warming up, Vance led his men to the bench in the visitor's dugout. There he delivered a brief but earnest lecture. After the talk the ex-minstrels proceeded to size up their husky opponents.

"Whew!" ejaculated Bayley as he watched the Colt backstop make two perfect throws to second. "Look at that wing, will you?"

"If he keeps that up," said Aldred, "we'll do mighty little stealing."

"Who is pitching?" asked Lynch, eying the thin, gawky southpaw who was limbering up his arm. "Looks like a scarecrow."

"That's Blackdaw," answered Vance. "Holds a record, I understand. Eight straight victories."

"Just wait till I get a chance at him," put in Lynch, grinning. "I'll have him running to cover." In view of the

fact that Lynch had not made a safe hit during the season, and held the record for strike-outs, it was not surprising that his companions laughed.

The band stopped playing. The umpire walked out before the grand stand and announced the batteries. The crowd cheered as the Colts trotted out to their positions. Blackdaw walked to the mound.

With the umpire's sharp "Play ball!" Keen, who headed the batting order for the Reds, picked up his bat and stepped briskly to the plate. Blackdaw sent over two perfect strikes before Keen realized it. Then he swung on the next ball and rolled an easy grounder to the first baseman. Bayley, up next, hit the first ball pitched and reached first by a narrow margin, but he was out by six feet when he tried to reach second on Aldred's bunt. Conner waited calmly until two and three had been called on him. Then he lifted a weak fly to center.

"Not so bad for the opening," muttered Bayley as the Colts came racing in. "We'll get to that southpaw in the next session."

With the Reds in the field, Vance faced the first Cuttyville man, whipping over a strike before the batter was prepared. Then he threw four straight balls, and the crowd yelled as the batter ambled to first.

"Tighten up, old man!" shouted Conner, pounding his glove.

The next Colt, in trying to sacrifice, popped up a foul that Bayley trapped. The third man bunted successfully, and thanks to Lynch's fumble reached first safely. With a man on first and second, Vance wound up slowly and made the batter swing at a slow one. But the next ball slipped and the batter met it square on the nose. It sailed in a straight line for Reed. The surprised third baseman leaped into the air, stuck up his gloved hand, and, to the amazement of the crowd, as well as himself,

nailed it. Whirling like a top, he threw to second, catching the runner a foot off the base. It was a quick play, and the fans shouted their approval.

As the Reds came back to the bench Reed was grinning foolishly.

"Pure luck," he admitted. "Don't know how I did it."

The second inning produced nothing remarkable. Vance's men came through with two safe hits, but Hardy was caught napping at second, Lynch struck out, and Vance could do nothing better than lift a high foul, which the third baseman, by a remarkable spurt, managed to get under.

In the third inning, two errors let in the first Colt tally, and the excited fans went wild. Vance tightened up after that and struck out the next two men. The Reds reached third in the first half of the fourth inning, but could not score. In the last half, with two men down, the third batter crashed out a homer and brought in the second run. By the end of the fifth inning the two Colt runs looked as big as a barn.

"I'll be satisfied if we can hold them down to that score," said Vance as he took his seat on the bench in the first of the sixth. "Not so bad for amateurs."

"No chance," muttered Reed. "We can hit Blackdaw all right, but we can't get around the circuit. That backstop is a marvel. Wonder what he's doing out here in the bushes?"

"He's nervous," put in Lynch. "Hand him out a line of chatter when you go up next time. Maybe he'll fall for it."

The Colt catcher did fall for it. Keen started in to guy him as he stepped to the plate. He swung wildly at the third strike. The catcher let it go through him. Instantly Keen shot up the line to first, and was called safe. Bayley, continuing the same tactics, fouled the first three balls and drove the next one for a clean single over the second baseman's head. With two men

on and nobody down, things began to look encouraging. Lynch trotted over to the coaching line.

"Here goes your old ball game now," he shouted, dancing up and down and waving his long arms. "Here it goes!" In spite of his antics, which the crowd enjoyed, if the Colts didn't, the luck was short-lived. Conner whiffed on three wide ones and Reed hit into a double play.

"It's a long, long way to Tipperary!" some one shouted from the stands. And Lynch, walking out into the field, scowled.

In the last half of the sixth the Colts managed to squeeze in another run. Vance handed a pass to the first man up, who promptly stole second when Bayley let a ball go through him, and scored on a long fly and a hit.

When the Reds came in for their chance at bat, Vance, for the first time that afternoon, caught sight of Scanlon, who occupied a chair in one of the improvised boxes, along with his friend, Tabor. Scanlon gave Vance a sign, got up from his chair, and disappeared through a door leading under the stands. Vance skirted the bleachers and walked around to meet him.

CHAPTER VII.

PUT ON THE MAP.

AS Vance was passing along the boarded exit chute he ran into Kohler, of the American House.

"Hello, Mr. Vance," said the clerk. "Tough luck, isn't it? I guess Cuttleville isn't on the baseball map, eh?"

Vance smiled. "The Colts are something to be proud of," he admitted. "They're a scrappy bunch."

"If I had only known as much this morning as I do this afternoon," said Kohler, "I might have picked up a little loose change. The Colts weren't in on the betting at all. We never thought they had a chance against the Mar-

against your team," he explained, grinning at the break he had made. "No one thought so—except that chap Scanlon and his friend."

Vance's smile vanished as he turned to face the clerk. "Do you mean that Scanlon and his friend have backed the Colts?"

"Up to the hilt," Kohler replied. "He seemed to think the locals would have an easy time with you. The odds were five to two. We all thought he was crazy and covered his money. I put up twenty dollars myself. I guess he had the right dope, after all."

A sudden shout rocked the stands, and Kohler hurried away toward the field for fear of missing some of the evident excitement. Vance stood looking after him, his face set, his eyes clouded. In that instant the whole affair was clear to him.

Scanlon came down the chute to meet him, smiling broadly, his hands as usual thrust deep into his trouser pockets.

"Congrats, Vance!" he greeted. "You're doing fine. Keep it up! I didn't think you chaps could hold 'em down so well." He paused, surprised at the steady, searching look Vance bestowed upon him. "What—what the deuce is the trouble?" he went on.

"Look here, Scanlon," Vance returned sharply, "have you been backing the local team?"

"Oh, a little. There seemed to be plenty of coin floating around, so I thought I might as well have a look-in. Not sore over that, are you?"

"So you took advantage of the Cuttyville crowd and played a sure thing, did you? You framed up this game—"

"Framed up nothing!" Scanlon cut in quickly. "If the rubes want to bet on you, why should I stop them? I couldn't explain, could I?"

"No," Vance returned evenly, "you could not explain. I grant that. But you knew who we were, you knew we

didn't stand much of a chance against the Colts. You shouldn't have bet at all. If I had known this before the game started I wouldn't have played."

"What have you got to kick about?" Scanlon contended hotly. "Thanks to me and to my little idea, you and your crowd are going back to New York on the cushions. I tipped you off and made everything easy for you, didn't I? And now you're crying because I get a little reward for my work. I'm not roaming the country for my health, Vance. I saw the opportunity for a clean-up, and I grabbed it. It's strictly business with me. You fellows aren't suffering. You're in clover. Why, if it hadn't been for me you'd all be on your uppers."

"I'm not going to pretend that I did this just because I felt sorry for your crowd, for I didn't," he continued, giving Vance no time for further protest. "Sympathy isn't in my line. I've made the rubes here believe that you are Murphy and that your bunch are the Marauders. You haven't committed yourself. You've played safe. So, now that you've heard the dreadful secret, what are you going to do about it?"

"Do? I'm going to show you up."

Scanlon laughed. "Show me up? How? Going to tell the crowd out there the truth? Take a tip from me, my boy. Don't try it! They wouldn't appreciate your kindness at the present time—and it's a blamed long walk back to Thirty-fourth Street."

"How much of the Red money have you covered?" Vance asked quietly.

"Oh, a few thousand. They're a royal bunch, I guess *not*—these Cuttyville sports. Why, I even got a bet on with Wingfield. Think of that! The Colts' own business manager! He thought he had a sure thing. They all thought that—a couple of hours ago. They're rooting for the home crowd, but they put their money on the Reds. Can you beat it?"

"I made it clear to Wingfield before I closed with him, Scanlon, that we weren't Murphy's crowd. I did not want to have any misunderstanding about—"

"Why, say, the more you talked against it, the surer he was," broke in Scanlon. "He's so certain that you are Murphy and that your troupe of minstrels are the Marauders, that he'd put up his hotel on a wager. He says he spotted you right away—thinks he's a sure-enough Sherlock. When it comes to solid-ivory domes, Wingfield gets the prize."

"I never thought of the betting end of the game when I agreed to the match," Vance said. "I might have known that your plea of sympathy was a blind. But I've always been on the square, and I'm not going to fall down now, no matter how badly we need the money. I'm speaking for every one of the boys, too."

"That's all right," argued Scanlon. "You're doing the square thing, aren't you? You told Wingfield the truth. If he doesn't believe you, it isn't your fault. All you have to do now is to keep your mouth shut, look wise, get your share of the gate receipts, and board the next train for New York."

"Yes," Vance returned grimly, "I can do all of that. But I'm going to do one thing you haven't counted upon. I'm going to square myself with Cuttyville."

"How's that?"

"The Reds are going to win the game this afternoon."

Scanlon smiled. "You're starting in rather late, aren't you? With a three-run lead staring you in the face, and with only two more innings to play, you're as good as beaten right now."

"We're not beaten until the last man is out in the ninth inning," said Vance. "Just remember that. And while you're remembering, allow me to extend a little advice. When the game's over, you

and your friend had better disappear. That's all."

Vance turned, fighting down all the resentment he felt toward the self-confessed crook, then walked through the exit and out upon the field. Scanlon looked after him, then laughed nervously, drew a cigar from his pocket, and lighted it.

"It can't be done!" he muttered between luxurious puffs at the weed. "Those ham actors haven't a chance! Not a chance in the world!"

CHAPTER VIII.

NEARER HOME.

WHEN Vance left Scanlon's presence and found himself once more upon the field, with the shouting crowd about him and his companions still on the bench and at bat, his expression changed.

The seventh inning had dragged. There had been several disputes with the umpire, so Keen informed his manager, and all of them had been settled in favor of the Colts. Reed was at bat, and three balls had been called on him. Two men were out, and Bayley was taking a dangerous lead off third, having reached that port by a long hit and a Colt error.

Lynch was on the coaching line, relieving his mind of an excess of minstrel chatter, hoping to annoy the Colt twirler. "Hello!" he broke out, as Vance stopped beside him. "Thought you had been kidnaped. You're up after Reed, you know. I think we're going to start something now. We've got the catcher talking back to us, and that's a good sign."

"We must start something," Vance declared. "We must!"

Lynch shrugged. "I guess we can prevent 'em shutting us out. That won't be so bad. Oh, my!" he shouted suddenly, as Reed dropped his bat and trotted toward first. "See that? Black-

daw passed him! Now it's up to you, Vance."

Vance walked grimly to the plate. He had two hits to his credit that afternoon, but unfortunately in both instances there had been no one on bases. The situation was changed now. With Reed leading off at first and Bayley dancing nervously about on third, a nicely placed single would mean a tally.

When two balls had been called on him, Vance looked over at Reed and jerked the brim of his cap. Reed understood the signal. Vance squared himself, took a fresh grip upon his bat, and swung wildly at the next ball. Before it thumped into the catcher's mitt, Reed was tearing up the line toward second. The Colt backstop straightened swiftly and hurled the ball across the diamond. The crowd shouted frantically as Bayley raced home from third. The second baseman had to jump for the ball, and Reed slid under him safely. The time-honored double steal had worked to perfection.

The Colt backstop scowled as the Reds guyed him.

"Cheer up, Hermie!" Lynch sang out. "You'll learn to play ball some day. Sure you will!"

Vance let another ball go by him, which the umpire, apparently as rattled as the catcher, called a strike. Watching Blackdaw's next wind-up, Vance guessed at the throw and guessed right. There was a sharp crack as the bat disputed the right of way with the ball.

"O-o-oh, my!" yelled Lynch.

Vance dug his toes into the soft dirt and raced up the first-base line. As he turned, after touching the bag, he saw the left fielder running backward to get under the ball—and kept on toward second. Lynch was turning cart-wheels on the coaching line, while Reed was speeding home.

The crowd in the stands, silent for the breathless interval, suddenly broke into a roar. By that time Vance had

made a perfect slide into the third sack. But the Colt third baseman had tossed away his glove and was running for the bench.

"What do you know about that?" cried Lynch, helping Vance upon his feet. "The Colt speared the ball! Speared it with one hand. Now Reed's tally won't count."

"Well, we've scored on them," returned Vance. "That helps some."

The pitcher-manager went into the box in the last of the seventh, grimly determined to hold down the Colts to the three tallies. The first man to face him struck out, while the second fouled three balls before flying out to Keen in center field. The third man smashed a line drive straight into Vance's hands. Only three men had faced him in that inning, and not one of them had reached first.

Hurrying back to the dugout, he gathered his players around him. "Boys," he announced gravely, "we've got to win this game. If we don't"—he used Scanlon's phrase—"it'll be a long walk back to Thirty-fourth Street."

"What's the matter?" Lynch inquired. "Do you mean if we don't win out we don't get our share of the gate receipts?"

"I mean," Vance explained, lowering his voice, "that if we lose the game, Scanlon will pocket several thousand dollars of Cuttyville's money. This match was a frame-up on his part. The Cuttyville crowd backed us, believing us to be the Marauders. Scanlon was sure we would lose and covered all bets. Now the only way we can square matters is to buck up and win. After that, if explanations are needed, we'll find friendly ears. This is the first of the eighth. Let's start things."

The eleven listeners, angry in eleven different ways, assured Vance they would do their best.

"Prospects aren't cheerful," commented Keen, as Tarbell, the first Red

up to bat, fanned on three pitched balls, "unless something busts!"

"Then something will bust," returned Vance.

Hardy walked out to the plate, allowed two balls to go by him—both strikes—suddenly remembered what Vance had said, and hit for a single. Then Lynch took his place and hit into an easy double play, retiring the side.

"If you had asked us to pick up the grand stand and carry it across the street, we might do it," he said dismally, as Vance passed him on the way to the box. "But we can't bust this outfit."

"We've one more chance at bat," was the reply. "Don't forget that."

The last half of the eighth inning produced neither runs nor thrills, and the crowd in the stands and bleachers prepared themselves for the final session. With the score of three to one in the beginning of the ninth, it looked like a Colt victory.

Keen, heading the Reds, faced Blackdaw, with a grin. He waited out three wide throws, and then, probably remembering how alluring the lights were on Broadway, smashed into the next ball for a single.

"Now we start!" cried Lynch, springing from the bench and hurrying over to the coaching line. "Now we're off!"

"Watch out for a double play, Bayley!" Vance warned the big catcher, as the latter picked up a bat. "A nice little bunt will do."

Bayley smiled. Bunt? Not much! Double play or not, he intended to hit good and hard. Perhaps the absolute confidence that was his at that moment had something to do with the result, for he swung mightily at the first ball Blackdaw gave him, and saw the sphere sailing like a gray streak over the shortstop's uplifted glove. Keen reached second without much effort; and by the time the ball was recovered, Bayley was hugging the initial sack and grin-

ning back at Vance as if to say: "Why bunt, when the hitting's good?"

"Nobody down! Nobody down!" Lynch howled.

As Conner came to bat, the Colt catcher walked out into the diamond to hold a conference with the pitcher. When the receiving end of the Colt battery took up his position again, Conner spoke to him: "Keep alive, old sport! I'm going to bunt. Honest I am. Just watch!"

Conner kept his word. The second ball, which he barely tapped, rolled a few feet along the first-base line. Conner hesitated, as the catcher lunged forward to pick it up, then he dashed ahead. The Colt backstop was bowled over, and Conner beat out the delayed throw.

"Whoop-e-e!" shouted Lynch. "Everybody safe! How easy! Now for the fireworks!"

With the bases full and no one out, Reed stepped to the plate. Blackdaw was a trifle shaky now, and sent over three balls in succession before the batter found one to his liking. Then he popped up a weak fly that the third baseman took care of.

"Only one gone! Only one!" Lynch announced, as Vance walked out. "You can't go wrong now!"

The crowd in the stands leaned forward as one man. They realized as well as the batter that almost any kind of a hit would bring in two runs. And two runs were all the Reds needed to even up the score and make a tenth inning possible. The catcher, crouching back of the plate, fumbled nervously at his glove. Vance looked over at Scanlon, who was sitting on the edge of his chair, his face strained and worried. Blackdaw wound up slowly, and sent the first ball across for a strike.

His next two efforts were not so good. Vance fouled the third ball, and it went for the second strike. Blackdaw's next offering was so wild that

the catcher had to jump for it, but the Colt backstop held onto the ball and glared defiantly around at the runners poised on tiptoe at each corner of the diamond.

Vance drew in a quick breath, and took a fresh grip upon his bat. With two strikes and three balls called on him, he had the Colt twirler at a disadvantage. Blackdaw had to put the next ball over for a strike, or force in a run. Vance knew it; every player on the field and on the benches knew it; every watcher in the stands knew it.

The batter waited confidently; so did the silent and expectant hundreds in the stands. Something had to break—and quickly. That something happened. The ball, leaving Blackdaw's fingers, came down like a streak. Vance stepped back and swung. With a pistol-like report, the ball sailed into the outer field. Vance sped up the first-base line as if setting a pace for a hundred-yard dash, while the other runners moved around the diamond like so many automatons released by a spring.

The Colt fielder, aware that he could not catch the ball, did all that was possible for him to do—made a spectacular leap, and, with a swing of his gloved hand, knocked down the ball. By that time Keen and Bayley had galloped home. The fielder, recovering the ball, whipped it swiftly to third, and Conner was tagged out, Vance remaining safe on the middle sack.

Pandemonium broke loose. The occupants of the stands were turned into shrieking, hysterical, gesticulating maniacs. With two men out, Vance's timely hit had tied the score. It was up to Vance now to do some quick thinking. It was Tarbell's turn at bat, but the uncertain left fielder for the Reds had struck out twice before, and Vance did not propose to take chances with him again at so critical a moment. He signaled to Lynch, who dashed across to the bench. A pinch hitter's opportu-

nity was at hand, and Crocker was the man to fill the position.

CHAPTER IX.

SPOILS OF VICTORY.

CROCKER had given a good account of himself in the games the ex-minstrels had staged before, and he was out of the present match only because of a wrenched knee. But he could hit, if he could not run; and a healthy wallop was the thing desired. Evidently feeling the great responsibility that had been shifted to his shoulders, he selected his bat with care and limped to the rubber.

A silence that would have shamed a country churchyard fell upon the stands as Blackdaw wound up and sent the first ball sizzling into the catcher's mitt.

"Str-r-ike!" boomed the umpire's sonorous voice.

Blackdaw, interested only with the batter, did not watch the runner on second as closely as he should. Vance was aware that a signal had been given to the Colts to play in close, and he saw the third baseman creep nearer to the plate. As Blackdaw slowly lifted his arms above his head, Vance shot down toward third.

Crocker saw the move, and helped matters along by swinging wildly at the ball. The Colt backstop reached out for the delivery, caught it, juggled it a second, and pegged the ball in a straight line to third. But the baseman was playing too far in, and Vance was safe on a slide.

He got upon his feet again, and slowly dusted himself, while the jubilant Lynch danced wildly up and down the coaching line. Crocker had two strikes called on him as Vance took a hazardous lead off the third bag. With an eye cocked speculatively upon the runner, Blackdaw made his next delivery purposely wide.

Crocker half struck at the ball, but caught himself just in time. He was obviously uncertain and shaky. His début upon the scene at so critical a period had unnerved him. Vance was quick to realize it, and as quick to put a desperate plan into operation.

As Blackdaw went through his preliminary winding-up motions, Vance edged farther and farther away from the bag. As the ball left the pitcher's hand, he started forward, and to all appearances stumbled heavily. Luckily the ball went wide. The Colt backstop, quick to see the apparent advantage, straightened, stepped back, and threw like a flash to third. Before the ball left his hand, Vance was up on his feet and sprinting toward home.

The amazed third baseman, never counting upon so bold a trick, ran down the base line, trapped the ball, and returned it without waiting to get set. He made a swift and fairly sure return, considering his position and unpreparedness; but the ball sailed a trifle low. The catcher braced himself with one foot on the plate, reached out—a fraction too far—and lost his balance as the ball hit the dirt and his glove at the same moment.

Vance launched himself along the ground, feet forward. His toe caught on the rubber, his body slued around in a half circle, avoiding the backstop's touch, an instant later, by many inches. The umpire was on top of the play, and could make no mistake. A wide sweep of his hands, palms down, indicated that the runner was safe.

Vance was dragged to his feet by his excited and admiring companions, while the crowd in the stands, electrified by the sensational bit of strategy, howled their approval. The air was still buzzing with comments when Blackdaw, partly recovered from the shock, sent over the third strike on Crocker, retiring the side.

"Four is all we want!" Lynch cried.

"That's enough! Four to three it is, and four to three it'll stand!"

The exulting Reds trooped out into the field, and Vance stepped into the box, ready for the final session. The crowd cheered him. If he could only hold the Colts down to their three tallies, the agony would be over. He nerved himself for the struggle.

Before the first Colt faced him, however, a lengthy conference took place on the locals' bench, with the result that a new man stalked grimly to the plate. It was evident that Cuttyville intended to begin their last chance with a pinch hitter.

Vance fooled the batter with a slow drop. A ball and two foul tips followed. Vance's next offering broke too soon, and the eager pinch hitter lived up to his reputation by clouting out a single over Conner's head. The second Colt to toe the rubber was also a stranger, and Vance had two and two chalked against him before he connected. Reed ran in on the low drive, scoped it up neatly—and threw wildly to first. Before Aldred could recover the ball, both pinch hitters were safe.

Two men on bases and no one out was the situation that confronted Vance when Blackdaw, the Colt twirler, stepped to the plate. Vance made him bite on a swift curve. Two balls followed in quick succession. Blackdaw grinned. The confident pitcher shrewdly judged the next offering and hit a drive into Lynch's hands. An easy double play should have been the result, but the eager and overconfident shortstop let the ball slip through his fingers—and the bases were full.

Vance did not look around again, once the ball had been returned to him. What he had feared had come to pass: the men behind him were slowly, surely "cracking." The strain of the last two innings had been too great for them. After all, they were actors, not ball players—untrained, easily confused, in-

experienced. That they had put up so game a fight was to be marveled at; that they were breaking down at the last was not their fault. Only a miracle could save them from defeat now.

The batter to face Vance in this breathless and pregnant moment was the Colt backstop. Vance had fooled him before. Could he do it again? He took his time, and shot the first ball over for a strike. Next came a ball. Then suddenly, even as he threw, a sharp pain stabbed his arm. He knew what it meant. He was breaking like the rest of his men. His arm was gone; the tortured muscles could be driven no longer. The ball he had meant for a swift inshoot left his fingers slowly and wabbled toward the plate.

The expectant Colt, shoulders hunched, his bat poised, stepped in to meet the delivery. He hit the sphere squarely and mightily. It shot away in a terrific line drive straight between shortstop and the pitcher's box.

A thunderous shout went up from the stands. With a bound, even as the impact sounded, Vance leaped into Lynch's territory, his gloved hand extended. The swift, stinging ball was pocketed with a "spat" heard to the farthest corner of the grand stand and above the roar of the occupants. Even with the ball safely trapped, Vance did not halt. He kept on his course, tagged the Colt racing down from third, whirled dizzily, and shot the ball to Conner on second. Conner, on tiptoe, caught it and dropped like a flash, a yard from the bag, upon the Colt runner coming up from first.

The dazed crowd—and even the Colt players—scarcely realized what had taken place. It was only when the umpire waved his arms and shouted "Side's out!" that the full meaning dawned upon them. Vance, assisted by Conner, had made a triple play—the Colts had been retired—the game won.

The cheering crowd broke from the

stands, and swarmed out upon the field as the players, victors and vanquished, dashed toward the clubhouse.

Half an hour later, Vance was in the grand-stand box office with Mr. Wingfield, business manager of the Colts, and had received his share of the gate receipts—five hundred and twenty dollars.

"Vance," said Wingfield, after the statements had been signed, "I've got to hand it to you! You're immense! You pulled that game out of the fire in the last inning. Cuttyville has been given a treat."

"I am glad you are satisfied," Vance said. Already he was framing up an explanation. He felt that Mr. Wingfield ought to know the truth.

"Satisfied is too mild a word," Wingfield returned. "And in view of the unusual circumstances—" He paused and smiled, remembering that two hundred dollars of Scanlon's money awaited him at the hotel. "Well," he went on, his eyes twinkling, "for a crowd of stranded minstrels, you've covered yourselves with glory. By George, you have!"

Despite his surprise, Vance did not betray himself. "We never pretended to be anything else," he said quietly.

"That's right! You didn't! You told me straight when we arranged for the match yesterday. All the misrepresentation was on Scanlon's part—and I guess he has paid for it. I believed him at first. I was convinced that you chaps were the Marauders. Then accidentally I overheard the little discussion that took place between you and Scanlon behind the grand stand during the seventh inning. I was amazed, of course, but I liked the way you talked to that crook, Vance! By George, I did! That's why I didn't interrupt. You said you were going in to win—and I believed you."

"And Scanlon—" began Vance.

"He and his friend slipped away

when you pulled off that trick in the last inning," the manager replied. "They are probably down at the depot now, waiting for the first train out of town. And I don't think they'll be in any great hurry to come back again, do you?"

Vance smiled and shook his head. Then he slowly folded the bank notes that Wingfield had given him, and thrust them into his pocket.

"I'm convinced of one thing," he said at last. "There's more money in baseball than there is in minstrelsy."

Wingfield chuckled. "Every time!" he agreed.

A Substitute for a Wife

A YOUNG Scotchman had married an English lady, and some time afterward he paid a visit to a bachelor uncle in Scotland.

"Weel, Sandy, I hear ye hae gotten a wife," said the old man.

"Yes, uncle."

"What can she dae?"

"Do? What do you mean?"

"Weel," the uncle went on, "can she sew an' knit? Does she mend your claes?"

"No," the young man admitted.

"Humph!" commented the uncle. "Weel, does she cook? Can she mak' parritch?"

"Oh, no, uncle!" the young man explained. "The servants do all those things. But you should hear her sing, uncle. She has the most beautiful voice you ever heard."

"Sing!" repeated the old man scornfully. "Man, could ye no hae gotten a canary?"

Good Advertising

DISCUSSING the value of advertising the other day, a business man declared that advertising on a big scale was only of use if you had a really good thing to advertise. "You must never,"

he said, "try to rush the public into buying a bad article simply by advertising largely. They'll neither forget nor forgive if you do."

"Take the hen," he pointed out. "The hen is one of the greatest and most successful advertisers in the world. Every time she lays an egg she advertises the fact loudly. And that is real good advertising, *for no hen ever laid a bad egg!*"

Not Much on Looks

A DISTINGUISHED Chinese statesman tells the following story of his experience with a New York reporter:

"He wanted to know," the statesman says, "how many wives I had, and after I told him I had as many as I needed, he was impudent enough to ask how many I required. The question did not please me, but I did not let him know it, for that would have been a satisfaction to him which I did not wish to give."

"And so I asked: 'How many wives have you?'"

"The reporter answered quickly: 'None.'

"'Good!' I said. 'You look as if you might be able to take care of just that number!'"

He Knew

JACK was a country lad, but he had ambitions to be smart, so he went to the nearest large town and took service with a shopkeeper; but he determined to be very cautious, as people had warned him that the city folk might try to poke fun at him because he was green.

A staid old maid entered the store one morning. "I want some birdseed, please," she said pleasantly.

"No, no, ma'am; you can't *jush* me," replied Jack firmly, though respectfully; "birds grow from eggs, not seeds!"



Tale of Des Moines, Iowa

The House of Dread

By

Albert M. Treynor
Author of
"The Missing Melody"
"Shadowed in Chicago"

FOREGOING INSTALLMENTS.

A short narrative of previous events for the benefit of new readers.

ALARMED by the mysterious opening and closing of the cupola window in an apparently empty house, and finding that the private watchman can throw no light on the incident, Stanley Brett, a lawyer, reports the matter to Sutton, owner of the house. While Sutton is informing his caller that the opening of the cupola window has been a death omen twice, a bullet crashes in from the direction of the river and mortally wounds Sutton.

Seeing a man with a red lantern in a row-boat on the water, Brett races down to the river and, accompanied by Sutton's niece, Ardath Sargent, whom he finds there, commandeers a canoe and pursues the man with the red lantern. Ardath seems strangely reluctant to capture him, and hurries away after one look at his face when Brett at length catches him. The man—Grason—is arrested on a technical charge of spearing fish.

Brett, in company with his friend Doctor McQuaid and the night watchman, next examines the "haunted" house, and finds recent finger prints on the piano keys, mostly on the black ones, showing that it has been used by a person who plays by ear. The lawyer learns also that the bullet which killed Sutton came from a Mannlicher rifle, of which the only known specimen in Iowa is in Ardath's charge in the historical building. When he goes to look for it, it is gone. And it is Ardath who inherits from Sutton.

When Brett calls on her brother, Ralph, he finds that the young man is short in his accounts at his office, and has disappeared. Later Brett sees Ardath hurrying to the river at night with a long, slim package which she throws from a bridge into the water. He drags the river for it, and finds the Mannlicher rifle.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TELEPHONE TIP.



RETT never knew how long he sat dumb and motionless in the drifting canoe with the Mannlicher held in his pulseless grasp. He had lost all reckoning of time, he had lost every sense of his surroundings, and under the cloud that blotted all other impressions, his thoughts, his personal world, was included only the girl—and the fact that she had lied to him.

On the day before she had said that she knew nothing about the missing rifle, and now he found it in the package he had watched her throw from the bridge. He had fished up evidence that linked her inevitably with the crime of her uncle's death, yet even the certainty of her guilt at that moment seemed to trouble him less than the bitter knowledge that she had deceived him. In his eyes the lesser

offense had become the greater, because it struck more directly home.

It was a strange view to take; but he scarcely could be held accountable for his feelings. When a man suddenly loses a great and overpowering faith the thoughts that follow are not likely to be either clear or rational. Brett had believed in the girl, he had trusted her blindly, and he knew now that he came dangerously near to loving her.

A jolt that made the frail canoe quiver from bow to stern aroused him abruptly from his dark reveries. He looked up and saw that he had drifted against one of the wooden piles that supported the Urbandale trestle, a full half mile below the Sixth Avenue bridge. With a start of surprise he dropped the rifle to the bottom of the canoe and picked up his paddle. A few strokes sufficed to bring the craft about, and he pulled slowly back upstream and at length came to a landing at the club float. Here he disembarked, housed his canoe, wrapped the Mannlicher in an old piece of boat tarpaulin, locked the door of the club building, and left the river bank, and climbed to the street above.

When he reached the middle of the bridge he stood for a time, leaning against the high railing and gazing vacantly up the river. He did not know what he would say or what he might do when he met the girl; but he waited, half hoping, half dreading to see her boat come around the distant bend. He remained there for a long time—how long he could not have told. He was vaguely conscious that several owl cars clattered across the bridge behind him as he stood vainly gazing up the moonlit stretch of water, and as the night traction schedule was fixed on the even hours, it must have been near daybreak when at last he picked up the rifle and started for home.

As Brett had expected, he found

when he reached his bungalow that McQuaid had gone to bed, and he was very glad to gain his own room without meeting any embarrassing questions. His first concern was to hide the Mannlicher in his closet, and for greater security he locked the door and pocketed the key. Then he followed his friend's example and went to bed.

The sun was well up in the sky when he awoke from a fitful and troubled sleep. He did not feel at all rested, but he got up nevertheless, and after assuring himself that the rifle was safe, dressed and went downstairs. He realized that he had an unpleasant hour or two ahead of him, and was anxious to have the affair over with as quickly as possible. McQuaid had gone downtown, and Brett ate his breakfast in lonely silence.

He hurried through the meal with the air of a man who performs a distasteful duty, and as soon as he had finished he went to the telephone and called the historical building. An attendant who answered the phone informed him, as he expected, that Miss Sargent had not come in yet. She had sent an explanation, however, and Brett knew that she must have returned from her river expedition. Assuming that he would find her at home, he got his hat and walked over to the Seventh Street cottage.

He reluctantly rang the front-door bell and sadly waited for a response. The night had brought no relief to his troubled spirits, nor was his problem any nearer its solution. He had no plans for the moment, no definite thoughts for the future. He found himself on the girl's doorstep, and scarcely knew why he had come. There was nothing that could be said between them—nothing that could be righted or explained away. His duty was perfectly clear, and there was no reason to visit her at all. Yet, without exactly knowing why, he felt that he

must see her once more. The impulse was irresistible, and he obeyed it blindly and without a question.

It was Miss Sargent herself who came to the door. She did not seem in the least surprised to see him, and she even attempted to smile as she invited him into the house. He followed her to the tiny sitting room, but made no move to take the chair which she offered him. Instead, he turned silently to scrutinize her.

The effects of a sleepless night showed plainly in her face. Deep shadows seemed to lurk about her dark eyes, her cheeks were colorless, and when she spoke he caught a pathetic note of weariness in her voice.

"I have come to have a final understanding with you, Miss Sargent," said Brett at last. In spite of his effort to mask his deeper feelings he could not keep his tones steady.

The girl looked at him bravely from beneath her heavy lashes. "Yes," she said in a plaintive undertone. "It's about my brother, you mean? I suppose you saw the newspapers."

He shook his head slowly. "No—it's not altogether about your brother." He did not even try to hide his emotion now. "If it only were your brother! If—if—" He checked himself, and faced her with a sudden determination to end it all at once. "Miss Sargent, why didn't you tell me the truth about that Mannlicher rifle?" he asked.

She drew a short, tremulous breath and seemed to recoil from his sad, accusing glance. "Why—why, what do you mean?" she whispered.

"You told me that you did not know where it was," he said. "Last night I saw you throw it into the river, and I fished it up after you were gone."

"Oh!" she gasped. "You thought that I—" She broke off with a little, choking sob and could not finish her question.

"What else could I think?" asked Brett gently.

There was neither anger nor resentment in her manner, and in the dark, haunted eyes that searched his face he read only sorrow and wistful appeal. "You shouldn't have thought that," she said in a low, trembling voice. "I did not lie to you. I would not, even though I thought I should." She came a step nearer to him, and her hand went out pleadingly. "Won't you understand?" she begged. "I told you only the truth. I swear I did. Won't you please believe? You must believe me!" There was something in her attitude that strangely echoed Brett's feelings of the night before. She seemed to have lost sight of the real, the tragic, issue, even as Brett had done, and was concerned only by the lesser fact that he distrusted her.

He looked at her doubtfully, in vague alarm, and then in thrilling wonder at the half-guessed truth. It was some time before he could trust himself to speak. "I found it hard to believe anything against you," he said at length; "harder than you may think." He shook his head gloomily. "But what other choice did you leave me? I saw you with the rifle."

A touch of color came into her cheeks, and she lifted her head proudly. "I told you the truth," she repeated. "When we searched through that case and found the gun missing I did not know what had become of it. I did not even guess what had become of it."

As he gazed into her clear, unwavering eyes he felt a faint stirring of renewed hope—as if it needed but her unsupported word to restore his old confidence in her. "When did you know?" he inquired softly.

"I did not learn about the gun until after I had seen you," she said; "until last night."

"Where did you find it?" he asked. She hesitated an instant, and then

looked up at him in quick apprehension. "Must you ask me that?" she faltered.

He nodded grimly. "I'm afraid that I must."

She searched his face in frank perplexity. "You told me yesterday that you were not my enemy," she said after a pause. "I wonder how much further than that you might go." She gave a tiny sigh. "I wonder if you might really be a friend."

He gave her such an answering smile that even had she been blind she must have caught enough of its meaning to understand all that he left unsaid. She flushed consciously, but did not avert her glance. She began to speak in low, vibrant accents. "I'll tell you everything," she said, "if I may talk confidentially—as a client to her lawyer, as—as a woman to her friend. May I do so?"

Brett started to reply, but before he could find his voice heavy footsteps sounded on the front porch, and the doorbell rang. The girl turned in surprise, and tried to see through the window. Then, with a quick, anxious look at her visitor, she moved into the hallway.

The attorney heard the door open, he heard the sound of voices, and as he stood impatiently waiting for the girl to get rid of her inopportune caller, she returned unexpectedly to the sitting room with a short, red-jowled man at her heels. Brett glanced curtly at the newcomer, and it struck him that he had seen the heavy, florid face before, but he could not quite remember where.

The man did not appear to be at the same disadvantage. He nodded pleasantly, and it was evident from his manner that he recognized the attorney. "Good morning," he said, and then turned to the girl. "The chief wants to see you at headquarters," he said indifferently.

Miss Sargent's lips parted, and her eyes grew wide with dismay. "What chief?" she gasped. "What headquarters do you mean?"

The newcomer laughed grimly. "Detective headquarters," he informed her.

The girl's hand caught at the support of a near-by table. "Are—are you a detective?" she asked breathlessly.

"Of course," was the answer, and Brett suddenly knew the man as a plain-clothes officer whom he had seen in court on several occasions.

"But what—what do you want with me?" demanded Miss Sargent, her eyes fixed fearfully upon the face of her unwelcome visitor.

"The chief wants to see you about a rifle that's missing from the historical building," was the sharp reply.

Brett shot a quick, startled glance toward the girl, but she did not notice, and for the moment seemed oblivious of his presence. She was standing rigidly against the table, gazing at the officer with a sort of dreadful fascination. Her lips moved, but the two men could barely catch the words when she spoke. "What rifle do you mean?" she whispered.

"Your uncle was shot with a Mannlicher rifle," observed the detective coolly. "We find that you had such a gun in your charge at the historical building, and now it's gone. The chief wants to know why. He wants to know where it is."

The girl made a valiant effort to regain her self-possession. "How did you know that such a weapon was there?" she asked. "How did you learn that it was missing?"

"We probably wouldn't have known," admitted the detective frankly, "if somebody hadn't telephoned us to go look."

"Somebody phoned you?" she repeated in a dull undertone. "Who was it, please?"

"The man wouldn't give his name,"

answered the officer, "but he had the straight information all right, whoever he was."

Miss Sargent looked quickly at Brett, and there was scorn and bitterness in her glance, and a hint also of sorrow and regret. He felt the silent accusation of her eyes, but he said no word to defend himself. He dared not speak while the detective was in the room.

The girl, in the meantime, turned back to the officer. "I suppose that I'm under arrest," she said quietly.

"Not this morning," said the man, with a shake of his head. "There's no actual charge against you, and I came without any warrant. You can refuse to come if you want to, but I wouldn't advise you to do it. The chief wouldn't care for that at all."

"I'll go with you," she said. "Please wait until I can get ready." She started toward the hallway, but before she had taken a step a door in the back of the room was thrown violently open and a man appeared on the threshold. The girl wheeled suddenly, and a low-voiced exclamation broke from her lips. "Ralph!" she cried. "What do you want?"

Brett turned in blank astonishment, and found himself staring at the girl's fugitive brother. He had supposed that the young man was hiding at Camp Douglas, miles up the river, and his unexpected appearance in such a crisis left him breathless with wonder.

Ralph Sargent appeared to take no notice of the stir he had caused. He ignored his sister's protests, and, slowly crossing the room, he stopped before the detective. "If you don't mind," he said, "I'll go with you in her place. I stole that rifle from the historical building. Last night I threw it into the river. My sister knew nothing about what I had done. She never even saw the rifle." He nodded serenely to the officer. "If you're ready now, I'll go with you."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SUBSTITUTE PRISONER.

LOOKING on in silence, Brett felt a sudden liking for the young man who had hurried so opportunely to his sister's rescue. He was a thief by his own confession; undoubtedly had led a reckless and ungoverned life; nevertheless, he had met the final test with courage and dignity. There were no heroics in his attitude, only a simple and quiet determination to shield the girl. He may have taken the rifle, as he said, but it was not he who had thrown it into the river. That part of his story was a deliberate falsehood, but somehow it did not seem to Brett the sort of a lie to lengthen the score against him. Brett could not help feeling that his attempt to shoulder the entire blame went a long way toward retrieving his past.

The detective apparently did not share Brett's appreciation of young Sargent's sacrifice. A lively satisfaction showed itself in his red face as he stared at the man who had made himself a voluntary prisoner. "Well," he exclaimed, after a tense pause, "this is a surprise!" He laughed aloud. "I guess there's no question about there being a warrant for you. We've been looking for you and we have got you now. I don't think the chief will be very mad if I take you down in the place of your sister. You can bet on it that he won't!"

The officer scarcely could be blamed for his feeling of triumph, but at the same time his laughter was not very pleasant for young Sargent or his sister. Brett turned sympathetically to watch the girl, and found that she had taken advantage of the diversion and left the room. Almost before he had time to wonder where she had gone, she reappeared in the doorway with her hat and coat. The brother looked at her in sudden disapproval. "You don't

need to go, Ardash," he said quickly. He glanced appealingly at the detective. "She doesn't have to come along, does she? You surely don't want her now that you've got me?"

The man seemed to debate with himself. "Why, no," he said, "I don't suppose so." He eyed the girl somewhat dubiously. "If she promises to stay in town, and will come to see the chief if he sends for her, I guess it will be all right."

She smiled bitterly. "I'm not likely to leave town now," she answered, "even if I should want to. But I think I prefer to go with you."

The young man stepped toward her. "Don't come!" he begged. "I don't want you with me. I—it would make it much harder for me. If I need you I'll send for you. You'll stay at home, won't you? Please!"

She regarded him intently for a minute, and then slowly nodded her acquiescence. "Just as you say," she replied. "But any time you want me you must let me know."

The brother faced the officer briskly. "Any time you're ready now," he suggested, with a fine attempt at cheerfulness.

"We're all ready, I guess," observed the detective. He started to leave the room with Sargent, but stopped abruptly in the doorway and glanced back over his shoulder toward the attorney.

"We may need your testimony," he said. "This man admits that he stole the rifle. You won't forget that, will you?"

"I'll not forget," said Brett, and he remained quiet in the middle of the room until the front door slammed and he heard the departing footsteps pass across the porch and descend to the outer sidewalk. Then he turned to the girl.

She raised her eyes to his, and he saw that all the friendliness had vanished from their hazel depths. "I be-

lieve there is nothing more for us to discuss," she said coldly.

Her meaning was only too plain, but Brett was unwilling to leave her while the least vestige of distrust or doubt lay between them. "I'm sorry you think I've betrayed you," he said. "On my word of honor, I told no one that the rifle was missing. Some one else gave the police that information."

She scrutinized his face earnestly, and somehow he felt that she wished to believe him if she possibly could. "How could any one else have learned about it?" she asked uncertainly.

He shook his head. "I don't know," he answered. "I suppose it would be possible for another man to find out about the gun in much the same way that I did. But I can't imagine who would go to such trouble, or what his motive could be. It was evidently no one connected with the police." He regarded her curiously. "You don't happen to have any enemies?" he queried.

A startled look came into her eyes. "Why—why, no," she said. "I can't think of anybody who could wish to injure me." She paused an instant, and her expression gradually changed. "You really didn't tell, then?"

"No," said Brett.

There was something in his terse denial that must have carried conviction, for a gentle, trusting smile suddenly touched her lips. "I am very glad to know that," she said simply. Then, with an air of having settled her last doubts about him, she returned to their discussion of her own shortcomings. "You have probably guessed now how I happened to have the rifle after I told you that I did not know where it was?"

"I don't believe I have," he returned. "But I should like to learn how it happened."

"My brother did take the gun," she said. "He came to see me at the historical building one day and got it out

of its case while I was busy with my work. He lowered it from one of the rear windows, and came back for it afterward. I had no suspicion that he had done such a thing until he confessed to me—after I had talked with you."

"I'm beginning to understand!" exclaimed Brett, and he felt both relieved and troubled as the full significance of her statement dawned upon him. "Your brother had the rifle, then, on the night—" He checked himself sharply. "He had it on the night I met you at the river bank," he ended mercifully.

"Yes," she said, and looked up at him in pitiful pleading. "Don't judge him yet," she begged. "Please don't form an opinion until you've heard everything. My brother has been wicked and foolish. His extravagances have led him into bad ways. He has broken my heart by the things he has done. It looks very black for him now, and I can hardly blame you if you think him capable—if—if you think him worse than he really is." She paused for an instant, and then, as if scorning any further evasion or glossing over of facts, she met his glance squarely and frankly. "I can swear to you that he had no hand in my uncle's death."

Her manner impressed Brett more than anything she might have said. He studied her face an instant, and smiled reassuringly. "Won't you tell me about it, please?" he asked.

She seemed to gather a renewed confidence from him, and her voice was steadier when she spoke again. "Three days ago I learned about Ralph's troubles at the office. He had taken money, hoping in some way to pay it back, but—well, you know how those things always turn out. The deficit was discovered before he had a chance to make it good. He came home that night and told me that he expected to be arrested at any moment. I didn't have enough money to help him, but I made up my

mind to get it somehow. I saw his employers, and they agreed to hold off the prosecution until I had a chance to think some way out of the difficulty. Ralph spent most of that next day with me at the historical building, and it was then that he took the rifle. I knew nothing about this at the time, but that night at home I saw that he was excited about something, and watched him closely. He left the house after a while, and I was afraid that he had planned some desperate scheme to get himself out of trouble, and so I followed him.

"Ralph went straight to the river," she continued slowly. "He hired a row-boat and started to pull downstream, and I hurried after him in a canoe. I didn't know his intentions, but I was afraid that he meant to do himself harm. I thought for a while that he had lost his nerve and planned to drown himself. After a time I overtook him and begged him to go home. He refused to do so, and in my desperation I told him that I would try to get money for him from my uncle. He agreed to wait for me until I made the attempt. We went to shore near the entrance of Birdland, and then I noticed for the first time that he had a gun in the boat. He wouldn't tell me where he got it or how he intended to use it. I did not learn until the next night that he had stolen it from the historical building."

"Did you see a red light on the river at any time?" interrupted Brett.

"If I did I have no recollection of it," she said. "I was so worried about Ralph that I thought of nothing else." She shook her head despairingly. "My uncle could have saved us, but he would not do it. You came in when he refused to let me have the money, and you know something of what happened after that. I hurried from the house and returned to the place where I had left my brother. My canoe was still there, but he had taken his boat and

disappeared. I was waiting on the bank, hoping that he might come back, when you came along and found me there."

"You thought the man I chased down the river was your brother," observed Brett. "I knew at the time that you didn't want me to use your canoe."

"I—I didn't know what to think," she said, shuddering at the recollection. "You told me that my uncle had been shot, and for a minute I completely lost my head. It occurred to me that Ralph might have fired the bullet. He felt very bitterly toward his uncle, and—and he might have believed that he would gain something by his death. That fear lasted but an instant, however. Somehow, I was convinced that he could not have committed such a terrible crime. Still, I knew that he had a gun with him, and I feared that if he were caught then it would go very hard with him." She smiled faintly at Brett. "You are right. I didn't want you to use my canoe, and I'm afraid that I did fail to warn you when it looked as if we might go over the dam." She sighed softly. "I'm very sorry now. I—I want you to forgive me."

"In the circumstances," said Brett gently, "you couldn't very well have done anything else."

"You can imagine my surprise," she went on, "when we pulled that man out of the river below the dam, and I found that I had never seen him before. I was so unnerved then that I did not dare wait for you to question me. I was very grateful to you for not trying to detain me."

"What did you do afterward?" asked Brett.

"I got the canoe and paddled back up the river," she replied. "I went home and found that my brother was not there. I sat up for him nearly all night, but he did not appear, and the next day when you saw me in the his-

torical building I still had no idea what had become of him. That night I got word from him. He had learned that his employers had tired of their leniency and had asked the police to arrest him. He had fled up the river, and was in hiding at Camp Douglas."

"And the rifle?" suggested Brett.

"I found it that evening in his closet," she said. "In the time that I was on the river with you he had gone home and hidden it there. Then he became frightened and ran away before I got back."

"And, knowing that the gun might incriminate him, you took it down and threw it into the river. Is that correct?"

"Yes," she answered. "I believed that the police might come any minute to arrest Ralph, and feared that they might decide to search the house. I got rid of the gun, intending to send secretly for a new one to replace it. Then I went up the river to Camp Douglas and found Ralph there."

"I knew that," interrupted Brett, with an air of apology. "I followed you."

She looked up at him in astonishment. "You followed me?" she exclaimed. "I—I didn't know that!"

"I was careful not to let you find out," he returned lightly. He eyed her with curiosity. "Why did you go up the river? You endangered the safety of your brother by doing so."

Something of her old pride came back into her eyes. "I went to make him return and face it out," she said. "I knew that it would be better for him in the end, and besides I have no patience with a man who will try to hide from the consequences of his misdeeds. I had to talk to him very plainly, I'm afraid, but I convinced him that I was right. We returned early this morning in my boat."

"Did he tell you why he took the rifle?" asked Brett.

She glanced at him doubtfully. "Yes," she said, after a moment, "he told me, but I don't know just what you'll think of the story. He said that a stranger came to him a few days ago and offered him a thousand dollars for the Mannlicher rifle that I had in my charge at the historical building. The money would have settled his debts, and he succumbed to the temptation without asking any questions. He was to deliver the gun the night that my uncle was killed. The stranger agreed to meet him on the river bank near the Sutton house. He had gone to keep that appointment when I followed him. After I left him he rowed farther down the river to the spot where he expected to meet the man. That's why he wasn't there when I came back."

"And the stranger didn't put in an appearance, of course," observed Brett dryly.

"No," she said, anxiously watching his face. "And you—you don't believe what Ralph said?"

"I'm not so sure that I don't," he said, after a reflective silence. "I was really thinking of something else. The fact that another person knew that the gun was missing, and secretly phoned the police about it, may serve as some slight corroboration of his story." He gazed at her intently. "If your brother has told you the truth there is evidently some person who has gone to great lengths to get the two of you into trouble." He reached for his hat, and turned slowly toward the door. "I think I shall go down to police headquarters and have a little talk with Ralph. If there really is such a stranger in this affair it looks as if it would be worth our while to find him."

CHAPTER XV.

THE RED-LANTERN MAN.

BRETT went directly from Miss Sargent's cottage to the police station. He passed through the dingy

front corridor, and proceeded upstairs to detective headquarters on the second floor. A number of plain-clothes men were loitering about the place, and through an open door of the private office adjoining he caught sight of the chief of detectives, a quiet, keen-eyed officer with whom he had been acquainted for a number of years. He nodded casually to the men, and unceremoniously entered the inner room. "Good morning, chief," he said as he drew up a chair by the official's desk. "Had a chance to question young Sargent yet?"

The officer looked up from his work and smiled pleasantly. "Hello, Mr. Brett. I was sort of expecting you. Heard you were mixed up in this case." He turned around in his chair, and glanced toward the door. "They're bringing Sargent upstairs now. You may stay here while we talk to him if you like."

Brett nodded his thanks, and faced about curiously as he heard footsteps in the hallway beyond. Two men came through the outer room, and he saw that one was Sargent and the other the red-faced detective. The pair entered the chief's office, and the detective grinned cheerful recognition at Brett as he carefully closed the door behind him.

There was a brief silence, and then the chief got up from his desk and gravely confronted his youthful prisoner. "They tell me that you stole a Mannlicher rifle from the collection in the historical building," he observed.

"Yes," answered the young man, and Brett saw that while there was neither sullenness nor defiance in his manner, he was cool and self-possessed.

The chief fixed his eyes intently upon the young man. "We've got a warrant against you for robbing your employers," he said, "but we'll let that pass for the present. We want to get at the bottom of this other business now, and

you probably know that your safest course is to tell the truth."

Sargent nodded quietly. "I know that. Besides, there is nothing that I wish to conceal."

"I'm glad to hear that," was the answer. "You can begin by telling me whether you shot your uncle."

A dark red suffused the boy's face, but he seemed to lose neither his temper nor his composure. "I did not shoot him," he replied, in a steady voice, "and I haven't the faintest notion who did."

"Where were you at the time he was shot?"

"I was on the river bank near his house."

It was a startling admission for him to make, but the chief evinced no sign of surprise. "Did you hear any shot fired, or see any one else in the neighborhood?"

"I heard no firing," was the reply, "but I did see a man out on the river. He had a red lantern in his boat."

The chief glanced quickly at Brett, and then returned to his catechism. "What was the man doing?" he inquired.

"I don't know," said Sargent. "I thought he might have been fishing, but, his movements didn't interest me and I paid little attention to him."

"Where was the stolen rifle at this time?"

"I had it with me," was the reply.

The officer smiled grimly. "I suppose you know that that's a very damaging thing to admit. Your uncle was killed by a bullet fired from a .354 Mannlicher, and we've about reached the conclusion that the gun you had with you was the only one of its sort in the city."

"Yes," said Sargent, in a dull tone, "I was told—I heard about that."

"Well, what do you think about it?" asked the chief.

"I'm beginning to think that somebody has laid a wicked trap for me,"

he said bitterly. "Some one wanted me accused of my uncle's death." He shook his head despairingly. "I can't imagine why."

"Whom do you suspect?" asked the chief, but it was evident that he was not very deeply impressed.

"I don't know," said the boy. "It must have been the man who offered to buy the rifle from me if I would take it from the case." He glanced appealingly toward Brett, and then turned again to the officer. "You see," he went on, "he offered me enough money for the rifle to get me out of my other troubles. I hoped that I might be able to replace the gun later, and I took it. It never occurred to me that he only wanted to get me into worse difficulties, and I went to meet him on the river bank at the time he appointed."

"How much did he offer you for the rifle?" asked the chief skeptically.

"One thousand dollars."

"Quite a sum to pay for such a weapon," was the ironical comment. "That's about twenty times its real value."

"I thought myself that it was a singularly one-sided bargain," returned Sargent, "but I needed the money so badly that I didn't stop to question the man's motives."

The officer shrugged his shoulders. "I don't suppose you expect me to believe any of this story, do you?"

Ralph moved uneasily on his feet. "I hardly dared hope you would," he admitted reluctantly.

In the brief silence that followed, Brett got up from his chair and beckoned the chief into a corner of the room. "If there is any truth in the boy's yarn," he whispered, "I'll wager you that the man I caught on the river could fill in the details. I'm more than ever convinced that that fellow had a hand somewhere in this business. Why don't you show them to each other?"

"The red-lantern man, you mean?"

asked the chief. "Grason?" His lips closed angrily. "I'd give a good deal to prove something against that fellow. He's the most insolent proposition we've ever had around this station. And close-mouthed! I've talked myself black in the face trying to get a word out of him, and he just sits and grins. He won't tell us who he is or where he was stopping or why he came to Des Moines. And he clings to that fish-spearing story of his. I've about decided to give him a taste of something he won't like."

Brett chuckled suddenly, and, leaning closer, he whispered at some length to the other man. The chief listened quietly, but with a somewhat doubtful expression on his face; and, when the attorney had finished, he hesitated and glanced speculatively toward Sargent. "I don't know," he mused. "It's a bit risky. But—" He paused an instant, and then seemed to reach his decision. "I'll try it," he observed. "It may not work, but we can at least see what happens." He opened the door and summoned three of the men who were sitting about in the outer room. After a short, low-voiced conference, the three nodded their understanding, and, without a word, they left the office and trooped down the stairway.

As soon as their footsteps had died away beyond the lower corridor, the chief turned to Sargent. "We'll go downstairs to finish our talk," he said. Accompanied by the others, he led the way to the patrolmen's big assembly room on the first floor of the building. There were several uniformed officers loafing about the place, but he quickly cleared them out and closed the doors behind them. Then he said something in the ear of the red-faced detective, and motioned Sargent to sit down at one of the tables which the men used for their card playing.

The detective left the room, and the chief, with a sniff of disgust, walked

across the floor and threw open one of the big front windows. "Those fellows keep it hot enough in here to stifle a man," he said. "We'll let in a little fresh air."

Sargent nervously drew up a chair and sat down. Brett, after a moment, followed his example, but the chief remained standing. The three waited for some time without speaking, but, as the silence began to grow a bit oppressive, a rear door opened suddenly and a man was thrust violently into the room. In a single glance Brett identified the mysterious prisoner, Grason.

The man evidently had not been permitted to shave, and a haggard look from days and nights spent in basement cells was beginning to show in his face, but the old reckless light still flashed in his eyes. He did not seem to have been subdued in the least by his confinement. The detective who had him in charge pushed him across the room with a none too friendly hand. "He didn't want to come," he observed roughly. "Said he was tired of being talked at. I'd like to teach him what it means to feel tired."

The chief offered no comment. The instant the newcomer was hustled through the doorway, he had turned toward young Sargent and narrowly watched the young man's face. "Well," he demanded at length, "have you got anything to say?"

The young man glanced at Grason, then raised his eyes questioningly to the officer. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Do you know this man?"

"No," was the prompt answer. "I never saw him before."

"Better look again and make certain," advised the chief. "He isn't the fellow who tried to buy the rifle from you, is he?"

Sargent shook his head. "The other man's complexion was darker, and he was at least three inches taller than this

one. They haven't the last resemblance to each other."

The chief beckoned to Grason. "Come over here!" he ordered sharply.

The man moved reluctantly across the room, and leaned his weight against the window sill. "Well, what do you want now?" he asked gruffly.

"You heard what this young man said," replied the officer. "Was that the truth? You're sure you're not acquainted with each other?"

Grason looked sullenly at his inquisitor. "Never saw him before, and I don't care if I never see him again."

The chief confronted the man in exasperation. "I've had enough of this nonsense," he declared angrily. "I'll give you one minute to change your tone. What is more, you're going to tell me all about yourself without any more foolishness. I'm through being easy with you, and from now on I'm going to make you sweat!"

Grason did not answer. For a space he stood glaring at the officer. Then, with a sudden movement, he whirled around and vaulted over the window sill. The others caught a single, flashing glimpse of his heavy figure as he passed through the open window. There was a thud of shoe leather on the sidewalk below, a hurried scrambling of feet, and the fugitive started up the street as fast as he could run.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLUE PRINT.

AN observer might have supposed that Brett and the chief were so stunned by the man's unexpected escape that neither retained the power to think or act. The attorney did not stir from his chair, and the officer remained standing by the open window without making the slightest attempt to follow the fugitive. Young Sargent had started to his feet, but he made no further move, and indeed he seemed

as much disconcerted by the sudden turn of events as either of the others.

The red-faced detective alone appeared to arouse himself to the emergency. He had thrown himself across the room with a furious cry, and was just starting to clamber through the window when the chief caught him by the sleeve. With his body doubled across the sill the man squirmed around in the detaining grasp, and strove desperately to jerk himself free. "Here, what's the matter?" he panted. "Let me go!"

The chief pulled him back into the room and quietly closed the window. "You don't suppose you can run fast enough to catch that fellow, do you?" was the ironical query. "Why, he'd make you look ridiculous."

"What are you trying to do, anyhow?" gasped the detective. He turned and stared at his superior in open-mouthed wonder, his face a ludicrous picture of reproach and amazement and fatuous protest.

"Take young Sargent back downstairs," said the chief coolly. "When I want you to do any sprinting I'll let you know."

It was apparent from the detective's manner that he believed his chief had gone crazy, and he was at loss what to do or say in such an unhappy crisis. "But—" he stammered, "that man—Grason—he—he's gone."

"That," observed the chief dryly, "is what I should call a prima-facie proposition—a lead-pipe cinch." He grinned cheerfully. "Better get the other one locked up again before anything else happens."

The detective hesitated. It was evident that his world suddenly had turned itself upside down, and he was finding it very difficult to adjust his faculties to a new and bewildering state of affairs. A prisoner had escaped before his very eyes, and he was supposed to stand by and not even attempt to re-

capture him. For an instant it seemed as though he might rebel against the higher authority.

The instinct of obedience, however, finally asserted itself. In a sort of daze he turned and beckoned to Sargent. "Come," he said gruffly, and started across the room with lagging steps. As he neared the door he paused for a last pitying glance at his superior officer, and then left the room with his prisoner, slowly shaking his head and mumbling disgustedly to himself.

The chief looked at Brett and gave a short laugh. "Let's go upstairs," he said, and led the way back to his private office. Neither of the men commented upon the events of the last few minutes. While the officer returned quietly to his interrupted work Brett picked up a paper from the desk and sat down by a window to read the morning's news. There ensued a long silence that was broken only by the steady scratching of the detective's pen and the occasional rustle of Brett's newspaper.

Nearly an hour must have passed before the attorney finished his reading. He tossed the paper back on the desk, and, after inspecting his watch, he glanced up at his companion with a faint touch of anxiety. "It's after twelve," he said. "Do you suppose everything's all right?"

"I hope so," replied the chief. "We ought to be hearing before long." He gazed out of the window for a minute, and then resumed his writing.

Brett got up from his chair and began slowly pacing the floor. After a time he wearied of this exercise and sauntered into the outer office. Here he found the red-faced detective engaged in a silent search through one of the Bertillon cabinets. The man looked up glumly, and the attorney was on the point of making some cheering remark when his attention was arrested by the sound of loud voices in the lower

corridor. With a thrill of expectancy he ran into the hall.

A party of men were tramping noisily up the stairway, and as they came around the first landing he recognized the trio of detectives whom the chief had dispatched on a secret mission. Brett swept the approaching group with a quick glance, and in his sudden relief he nearly laughed aloud. In the middle of the little squad, hopelessly hemmed in on three sides, and climbing the stairs as if each step were a separate protest, came the fugitive Grason. The detectives on their part looked as if they might have belonged to an engineering party. One carried a surveyor's transit over his shoulder, another bore a rod and a coil of tape, and the third staggered under the weight of a heavy valise.

As the men escorted their unwilling prisoner into the front room the chief hurried from his office and regarded the newcomers with a smile of grim satisfaction. "Your scheme wasn't so poor, after all, Brett," he remarked in frank appreciation. "But I'll admit now that I haven't felt easy in my mind since I opened that window down there." He turned to the detectives. "Well, what happened, boys?"

The man who had brought in the valise dropped his burden upon the floor and grinned at his chief. "We waited outside, just as you told us," he said. "I took the alley across from the station, one of us stopped on the Locust Street corner, and the other went up to Grand Avenue. We saw your friend bound out of the window and go north. He turned the corner by the fire station and went up Grand Avenue like a streak. Bill watched where he went, while I ran up Locust. I headed him at the next corner, but slowed down before he had a chance to know that I was chasing him."

"He kept on as far as Fourth Street," the man continued, "and then turned

down to Walnut. I cut through an alley and got in front of him again. By that time he had let down to a walk. We were all of us careful not to let him see us running, and I guess he got a notion that he wasn't being followed. He tried to lose himself by doubling back and forth through the streets. I'll bet he walked miles without getting any place, but we all got together again, and after that it was easy. He worked out a regular puzzle picture before he got through, but we didn't lose a trick."

"You followed him home, then?" asked the chief eagerly.

"Kirkwood Hotel," was the answer. "He was registered there under another name. When he thought he was safe he came back up Fourth and turned into the lobby. He got his key and a time-table at the desk, and went to his room. When we finally jumped in on him he was packing his bag. Guess he was getting ready to grab the first train out of town."

The chief inspected the engineering instruments which his squad had brought into the office, and then glanced triumphantly at Grason. "Looks as if we had learned the nature of your profession, at any rate," he observed. "Surveyor, aren't you?"

The prisoner maintained a stubborn silence, and the officer for the moment did not press his inquiries. Instead, he picked up the valise, unfastened the heavy clasps, and dumped the contents out upon a large table. The men hastily examined the collection, and something like a sigh of disappointment passed through the little group.

Besides a bundle of blue prints and mechanical drawings there was a surveyor's compass, an assortment of drawing instruments, and an old suit of clothes. But in the entire lot there was not a single clew to suggest the man's identity or to explain the real purpose of his visit to Des Moines. The pockets

of the coat were empty, and even the tailor's label had been torn from the lining. The prints and drawings, although carefully executed, lacked any sort of marginal or explanatory note. It seemed impossible to learn their meaning, unless Grason chose to elucidate.

And Grason apparently had no such intention. After a puzzled inspection of the prints the chief had turned again to his prisoner, but it soon was evident that he had found his match. Grason had altered his tone somewhat, but his answers to the officer's questions, while plausible enough, were far from being satisfactory. He had a remarkable faculty of invention and a quickness of thought that gave him an almost uncanny skill at evasion. He outwitted the chief at every point, and as the inquiry progressed it was clearly seen that he was not apt to be trapped into any admission that he did not care to make.

Brett listened for a time to the chief's questions, but he soon recognized the futility of such a cross-examination, and turned his attention to the drawings on the table. He studied each print in turn, trying to think out what it might possibly represent. In this way he came at last to a large drawing that seemed to record a survey of some broad stretch of land and water. His smattering of technical knowledge enabled him to interpret the print after a general fashion, and he inspected it with growing interest.

Through the center of the sheet was drawn a curving ribbon in blue and white shading, and this he recognized as a stream of water. The ten-inch scale at the bottom of the drawing told him that the stream was a river and that it was at least a quarter mile in width. Two points, one on each side, were connected by a straight, faintly traced line, the purpose of which he was unable to determine. The rest of the plat, however, was more lucid. On

both banks of the waterway were jumbled groups of white dots, which, he guessed, were meant to represent wooded stretches. The sheet carried a sprinkling of tiny numerals, and he felt certain that these marked the various elevations and depressions of land.

Brett left his chair presently, and after a low-voiced consultation with one of the detectives he succeeded in borrowing a large, thin sheet of paper. He spread this out over the blue print, and made a careful tracing of the original drawing, taking pains to omit none of the numerals. His task finished, he folded the copy and placed it quietly in his pocket.

The detectives were so intent on their examination of Grason that none of them had given any especial notice to the actions of the attorney. For a moment Brett paused to listen to the inquiry, but finding that the prisoner was more than holding his own against the combined forces of the department, he turned at length and left the room. Hurrying from the station, he proceeded to the Locust Street corner. Here he caught a car and rode across the river to the statehouse.

He entered the capitol, and went directly to the adjutant general's office. In his somewhat extended circle of acquaintance Brett included one of the attachés of the militia department. He sought this friend now, and had little difficulty in persuading the man to lend him a pair of military field glasses. Equipped with the binoculars, he passed through the main corridor of the building and took an elevator to the top floor. From this point he ascended the steep, winding stairway that led to the great, gilded dome of the capitol. Reaching the top, he opened the door, which usually was left unlocked to visitors, and passed to the high, circular balcony outside.

Brett leaned against the guard rail and surveyed his surroundings. The

capitol stood on the crest of a sloping hill, and its lofty dome was probably the highest point in Des Moines. From his dizzy altitude the attorney obtained a clear view of the country for miles around. The city lay at his feet like a great map.

From the foot of the capitol grounds Locust Street stretched away in a straight line to the river, crossing its wide, concrete bridge near the new city hall, passing between the public library on the one hand and the huge coliseum on the other, and losing itself at last in the heart of the west-side business district beyond. A little to the left, the tops of the Hippie and the Fleming Buildings reared themselves high above their neighbors, and farther on he could make out the green sweep of Grand Avenue and the neighboring residence streets, with the glistening stretch of the Raccoon River twisting down from the west.

Brett adjusted his binoculars presently, and walking part way around the balcony he turned to view the heights of north Des Moines. From this point his glance ranged down to the curve of the Des Moines River, taking in the sandy beach along Boatman's Island, then the forest-grown area of Birdland and at last the smooth, green lawns of Union Park and the head of Pennsylvania Avenue.

After a time he brought out his copy of Grason's blue print. He studied this carefully for a moment, and then, smiling quietly to himself, he refolded the sheet of paper, returned the binoculars to their case, and descended from the dome. As soon as he had restored the field glasses to their owner he left the capitol, hailed a westbound street car, and started for home.

McQuaid was just finishing his luncheon when Brett arrived at the bungalow. The physician looked up curiously and with a hint of disapproval, too, as his friend came into the room.

"Where in the world have you been for the last day?" he demanded. "It must have been after daylight when you got in this morning."

"I've been very busy," was the hasty answer. "Haven't time to stop now. I'll tell you all about it later."

"Why such a hurry?" asked the doctor.

Brett had started toward his bedroom, but he turned for an instant and gravely regarded his friend. "I've got an appointment," he said, "or, at least, I fancy that I have. I'm going out to the government rifle range."

"You're going where?" demanded the astonished physician.

Brett chuckled softly. "Captain Rudd, at the army post, asked me to come out for some target practice," he answered. "I've decided to accept his invitation."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON HER WAY.

A WEEK passed, and so far as public knowledge was concerned the death of Cornelius Sutton remained as deep and perplexing a mystery as it had been that first night when the Mannlicher bullet came crashing through his library window. A coroner's jury had met, and, after solemn deliberation, returned a verdict of premeditated killing, and recommended Ralph Sargent to the mercies of the grand jury. No further steps against the young man had been taken, but it was popularly rumored that a first-degree indictment would be announced almost any day. Ralph had been transferred to more comfortable quarters in the county jail, and there he stoically awaited his fate.

As for Grason, the red-lantern man, he apparently had withheld the repeated grillings by the detective staff, and continued to be a hopeless puzzle to the department. A ruthless cross-ex-

amination had failed to elicit a single vital fact, and the police at last had given up the task. They still held him in his basement cell, but there had been no open attempt yet to connect him in any way with Sutton's death. The original charge of spearing fish in violation of the game laws remained on the sheet against him, but the police were careful not to let him go to trial on this minor count. They merely waited in the hope that some fresh turn of events should give them an excuse to ask for an indictment on more serious grounds.

Sutton's will had been probated a couple of days before, and the public was aware now that Ardash Sargent was to be her uncle's sole heir. Among the older families this announcement was received with frank satisfaction. Considerable hostility had manifested itself toward Ralph Sargent, but no one had even dared to suggest that the girl was in any way involved in her brother's troubles. The quiet, dignified manner with which she faced the family crisis had awakened general admiration, and she learned suddenly that the population of the city was made up almost entirely of friends and well-wishers.

Early in the week the girl came to Brett with a request that he take charge of her interests in the estate, and she also begged him to assume the defense of her brother. He was surprised and gratified by her confidence, but he hesitated nevertheless, feeling that one of the veteran criminal attorneys in the city might serve her ends better. She insisted, however, and he consented to take the case. At this conference Miss Sargent brought up the question of money. "I'll have more than enough later, but for the present I'm not very well off. It probably will be weeks before the affairs of the estate are settled."

The attorney smiled at his new client.

"I shouldn't worry about that," he replied.

"But I do worry," she insisted. "I can't have you paying expenses out of your own pocket." She remained thoughtfully silent for a moment. "My lease on the cottage expires in two weeks," she observed at length. "If I sign again it will have to be for a year. I wonder if it would be possible for me to move into one of my houses-to-be? I could save all that rent money, and it would be a great help to me."

"Why, I don't see why you shouldn't," he answered, quick to see the advantages of her scheme. "I'll talk to the probate judge if you wish me to. He's very friendly toward you, and I'm quite sure he'll let you take possession in a sort of unofficial way. Which house did you intend to live in?"

"The one on Arlington Avenue," she said promptly; "the house where my mother was born."

Brett looked at her sharply; and seemed on the point of making some objection, but he suddenly changed his mind, and quietly nodded. "I'll see if I can fix it with the judge," he promised.

And so it was settled. The attorney had little trouble in persuading the court to make a concession in the girl's favor. Two days later she made her plans to move.

The old house opposite Brett's bungalow suddenly awakened to the unfamiliar swish of brooms and the rattle of buckets. Windows were washed and opened, and the new, sweet air from out of doors was given its chance in the musty rooms. The furniture was renovated, the dingy curtains were laundered, the old rugs got their long-deserved beating, the leaking gutters were plugged, and the lawn received a cutting and a raking. Then Miss Sargent packed her personal belongings and moved into the old homestead.

Thus the ancient dwelling, after many years, came back into its own.

The house acquired a mistress, and later a maid—a portly, good-natured colored woman who answered to the name of Delilah. "I mean to go on working until my finances are in better shape," Miss Sargent explained, "so I shall need somebody to look after the house. Besides, I'm all alone now." She smiled pathetically at her attorney. "Delilah will be a sort of chaperon for me."

On the night that the expected indictment was returned against Ralph Sargent, Brett looked in to see his sister. She invited him to the little music room in the back part of the house and offered him a chair. "I spend most of my evenings in here," she said as she sat down before her grandmother's old piano and leaned her arm upon the polished case. "It's much cozier. I haven't quite got used to the other rooms yet. They seem so needlessly big."

Brett broke his news as gently as possible, and found that the girl was prepared for it. "I'm really glad that it's come," she said. "It will be better for all of us to have the trial over with as quickly as possible." She glanced unhappily at the attorney. "You're prepared to go to trial, aren't you?"

He nodded grimly. "Perhaps, I'm better prepared than the prosecution thinks. At any rate, I hope to have a surprise or two for them by the time the case is called." He regarded her curiously. "What are you going to do with your brother if we get him off?"

"I have had a talk with him," she answered, "and I know that he is ready to take up a new life if—if he has the chance. He wants to go on west and try to make a fresh start. I shall give him enough money to open some sort of business. He says he won't take it, but I'm going to see that he does." She

raised the lid of the piano and began idly strumming the keys.

As Brett sat watching her, she struck a tentative chord, and then slowly wandered into a quaint, languorous melody that seemed to awaken some old memory in the attorney's thoughts. He listened for a space, and suddenly got up from his chair. "Don't!" he exclaimed.

She stopped playing, and looked up at him in surprise. "Why not?" she asked. "I've just had the piano tuned."

"That wasn't what I meant," he returned. "It's—do you know what you were playing?"

"Why, yes. It's Rubinstein's 'Melody in F.' I learned it from my mother. Don't you like it?"

For a moment Brett seemed at loss to explain himself. "Why, yes," he said, somewhat embarrassed, "it's a beautiful air, but somehow I'd rather—I prefer to hear you play something else."

Her puzzled frown gradually gave way to dimpling amusement. "Why, I believe you're superstitious," she said. "I know what's the matter. You're thinking of that old story about my grandmother."

"You've heard it, then?" Brett asked.

"Often." She gave a tiny shrug of her shoulders. "My uncle was always talking about it. He had a horror of the melody. He wouldn't permit any one to play it in the house." She eyed her companion doubtfully. "You really don't think I should keep that old bogey alive, do you?"

"I don't know," said Brett, with a little laugh. "I—" He stopped short, and stared across the room as the ponderous figure of Delilah, the colored maid, appeared unexpectedly in the doorway. The woman was wearing her hat and coat, and in her hand she carried a heavy canvas valise. Her plump, black face had lost its old happy, care-free expression, and was now set in lines of stubborn determination. "I'm on my way from here," she announced,

in a tragic voice. "Good-by, Miss Ardath."

The girl got up from the piano stool. "Why, what's the matter, Delilah?" she demanded, in astonishment.

"What's the matter?" exploded the woman. "Don't you ask me what's the matter. Ask that other person what lives in this house and goes walkin' around all the time, a-openin' windows and a-closin' windows and trompin' around through these rooms, and never lettin' nobody see hide nor hair of him. You just ask somebody else what's the matter, Miss Ardath. I'm on my way from here."

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Sargent. "Do you think this house is haunted?" She repressed a smile. "Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

The woman shifted on her feet, and her glance roved uneasily about the room. "Don't you get to askin' me what I think," she muttered. "You got me sleepin' in that room under the—under that—"

"Cupola," suggested Brett, who was watching her dark face with a strange interest.

"—sleepin' under that tower," she went on breathlessly, "and last night that window up there went open, and the night before that it went open, and to-night I locked it down tight, and there weren't no mortal come into that tower, but it went open just the same. No, sir; don't you get to askin' me what I think. I'm on my way from here."

"Don't be absurd, Delilah," interrupted Miss Sargent. She turned appealingly to Brett. "Tell her how foolish she is," begged the girl. "Persuade her not to go. Talk her out of such nonsense."

Brett slowly shook his head. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I don't see that I can say anything to stop her going. Really, if I were in Delilah's place, I'm afraid that I, too, would be on my way from here."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE CUPOLA.

BRETT took his leave of Miss Sargent soon after Delilah had swept ponderously from the house. He saw that the girl was the least bit provoked at his failure to help her exercise the superstitious fears of her maid, but he only smiled as he said good night, and he went away without any attempt to excuse his singular course of conduct. Perhaps he did feel some slight sense of guilt for his part in depriving his client of her servant, but he eased his conscience with the thought that the woman could be replaced later.

For the present, he was sure that he could have said nothing to persuade her to stay. He knew as well as Delilah that something was distinctly wrong with the old house—that some lurking, silent, unseen thing did cause the cupola window to open and close at all hours of the night. Whatever strange agent was at work there, he had made up his mind to drag it from hiding and settle the grim rights of tenure for all time. And his plans, he believed, could be carried out more satisfactorily if the servant were out of the way.

Brett crossed the street to his own bungalow, but he made no move to go inside. Instead, he sat down on the front steps and waited. The period of moonless nights had set in, and, save for the dim yellow light of a gas lamp in the next block, the street was shrouded in darkness.

Across the road he could barely make out the square, black shape of the old cupola, and he could only approximately fix the position of the mysterious window. He watched the lights in the downstairs rooms go out one at a time, and presently a gleam appeared through the shade of one of the second-story windows. This, too, vanished after a while, and he knew that Miss Sargent had retired for the night.

He remained on the stoop a few minutes longer, silently contemplating the gloomy premises across the street. With the extinguishing of the last light, the old house seemed to come once more under the spell of its past. The recent signs of occupancy were lost in the darkness of the night. For the moment Brett scarcely could believe that any change had taken place. To his brooding fancy the events of the last few days were like the memories of a dream, from which he must surely awaken to find the old dwelling as he had always known it—silent, unoccupied, and lonely, waiting through the years for some one who never came.

The sound of footsteps in the next block aroused Brett, and, hoping that it might be McQuaid, he got up from the stoop and sauntered down toward the front walk. He was somewhat disappointed when he saw that the solitary pedestrian was only the night watchman. The man came up through the darkness, and stopped as he recognized the attorney. "Watching that house again?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know!" answered Brett lightly. "Do you think it's worth watching?"

"I should say that it was!" rejoined the other. "I've just met Miss Sargent's colored girl. She tells me that so many strange things have happened in that house that she decided to quit her job."

"That's odd," observed Brett carelessly. "But, then, of course, she comes from a race that believes in spooks and such things as that."

"I'm going to quit, too," volunteered the watchman, after a brief pause.

"You're going to quit?" exclaimed the attorney. "What for? On account of the Sutton house?"

"Well, not exactly on that account. I'm tired of the job, for one thing." The man hesitated, in seeming embarrassment. "I suppose maybe I do have

another reason," he admitted. "I don't exactly like the things I've seen around here lately, and I thought I'd better get off the beat before anything happens. I don't care for the responsibility."

Brett tried to see the man's face. "What is it that you've seen?" he inquired.

"Nothing at all, except what you yourself have shown me. You know as much about it all as I do. Maybe such things don't bother you, but I'd just as soon have somebody else take my job."

"When do you quit?" asked the attorney.

"This is my last night," the watchman answered. He turned away, and started up the sidewalk.

"Good night!" the attorney called, as he stood watching the retreating figure. "I suppose you and Delilah will have me moving out of the neighborhood next," he added, with a laugh.

Brett waited until the sound of the watchman's feet had died away in the next block, and then he crossed the street and tiptoed to the veranda of the old house. He climbed the steps softly, and paused before the window which McQuaid had forced open several nights before. He tried the frame, and found, to his satisfaction, that the broken lock had not been repaired. Pressing gently upward, he raised the sash inch by inch, and as soon as he had made the opening large enough he climbed over the sill and closed the window behind him.

For a time he stood in the front room, quietly listening. No sound of life came to disturb him, and he took it for granted that Miss Sargent was asleep. He had refrained from telling her of his plans chiefly because he did not care to let her know how seriously he was affected by the odd manifestations in her home. Either he would arouse her fears needlessly, or he would call forth her derision, and he was as anxious to

spare her the one result as he was to guard himself against the other. He felt, besides, that he could accomplish his ends best by working secretly and alone. If she should happen to discover his presence in the house, it would be time enough then to explain his errand.

Convinced that his stealthy movements had not been heard, Brett passed into the hallway and cautiously mounted the front stairs. He held his breath as he crept beyond the silent rooms of the second floor and stole through the doorway that led up another flight to the story above. He gained the top of this stairway without mishap, and a feeling of deep relief came over him as he groped his way forward to the tiny front chamber under the cupola. As he pushed open the door and entered the room, he struck a match and glanced about him.

This was evidently the room that Delilah had occupied during her brief stay in the house, and from the state of disorder in which she had left the place, he judged that she had packed her belongings in a considerable hurry. The darkness hid his smile of amusement as the match burned itself out. It was not difficult to picture Delilah's emotions when she cleared herself out of the tower chamber.

Brett had no need for a second match. He remembered his surroundings perfectly from his previous visit, and he moved without hesitation into the little alcove and confidently climbed the last flight of stairs to the cupola above. Here he struck another light, and a single glance showed him that nothing had been disturbed since he was last in the room.

The carpenter's bench still remained the only piece of furniture within the four walls, and a closer inspection proved that no one had made even a pretense of cleaning out the accumulations of dust. Before his match went

out, Brett examined the window. He tried both of the catches, and, after assuring himself that they were securely fastened, he moved softly across the floor and sat down on the workbench to wait.

How long he sat there in the darkness he could not have told. He heard a clock chiming somewhere in the distance, but he failed to count the strokes, and he did not care to risk lighting another match to look at his watch. After a time he drew himself farther back upon the bench and leaned his shoulders against the wall. He tried to fix his mind upon tangible things of the present, but somehow his thoughts kept reverting to the ancient tragedy of the old house—to the man who had thrown himself out of the cupola window and the woman who could not console herself with music and had tried to follow him.

A deathlike hush had fallen over the premises. There was neither sound nor movement nor hint of life anywhere about him. As the minutes dragged on interminably, there came to him a dim sense of uneasiness. An instinct seemed to tell him of some subtle change that had taken place in the dead atmosphere of the room, and there stole upon him a gradual consciousness of a faint, cold breath of air upon his forehead. He sat up with a start, and looked across the chamber.

He could distinguish nothing in the gloom, but had an impression that something had stirred along the opposite wall. Cautiously he drew a match from his pocket, and, with a little shiver of expectancy, he slid down from the bench and went forward on tiptoe. He was positive that no living creature could have crept into the room while he was keeping vigil, yet something was busy at the window fastenings.

He heard a distinct clicking sound, as if a catch had been drawn stealthily from its socket. With a sudden move-

ment he struck the match, and in the yellow flare of light he saw that the room was empty. He was alone in the cupola, yet— He glanced across the chamber, and the blood ran cold in his veins. The window was going up in its casement.

The match burned out and fell from his pulseless fingers. For an instant he stood rigidly in his tracks, his eyes staring wildly through the darkness. Then, scarcely knowing what he did, he stepped forward and touched the sash. He pressed down unsteadily with his fingers; but the window, obeying some unseen force, continued to slide upward, raising his hand with it as it slowly opened.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS.

THERE are certain natural laws that remain forever unchanged. A window, for instance, may not go up without human assistance. If its counterweights should happen to break, it conceivably might go down alone; but it could never go up. Such was the substance of Brett's thoughts as he stood in the deserted cupola of the old Sutton home and watched the sash of the window gradually ascending in its casement.

There was evidently something wrong with his logic. That which he was positive could not happen was taking place before his eyes. He was not dreaming. He knew that he never had been more widely or intently awake. Nor was he frightened. He was quite sure of this, because with fear there always comes the impulse to run away. Brett did not want to run; he probably could not have done so if he had tried. A strange, chilling fascination held him powerless to move. He felt an insane desire to laugh, but somehow the muscles of his throat refused to respond to the wish.

So he merely held his breath and waited.

It seemed to him that the sash never would reach the top of the casement. It moved slowly, almost imperceptibly, as if a sly and cautious instinct governed the invisible power behind it. His suspense brought on a singular feeling of resentment. If the thing must go up, he could not see why it needed to take such a time about it. He had a whimsical notion that he might help it along with a good, forcible boost, but before he could carry out this idea the sash finished its journey unaided and came to a rest against the upper casing.

Brett hesitated an instant, and then, gripping the sill with his fingers, he leaned far out over the open ledge. He carefully scrutinized the outer wall of the cupola, but even as he did so he knew that he was wasting his time. There was not the tiniest projection either above or below where any climbing human might have obtained a foothold. If this had been possible, the unfastening of the locks remained to be explained. This could not have been done from without. On the other hand, he knew that no person beside himself had entered the cupola.

He drew back into the room presently, and inspected the window from the other side. Lighting another match, he went painstakingly over the entire sash, but, as on the night of his previous search, he found nothing to explain the phenomenon. The mystery apparently had no material solution. As far as he could see, there were no cords or wires, or, in fact, any other device by which the window might have been either pushed or pulled up from without the cupola.

It occurred to him that there might be something queer in the construction of the chamber walls—some sort of trapdoor or sliding panel, perhaps, or a secret passage or compartment. He could satisfy himself on this score, at

least, and until his nerves became steadier he was glad to find some definite occupation for his thoughts.

He began by an examination of the floor. Starting in one corner of the room, he made his way forward on his hands and knees, trying each separate plank with the blade of his knife in an attempt to learn whether anything was loose. He experimented in this way upon every square foot of floor space, but, as far as he could determine, the boards were all nailed securely to the joists underneath. Convinced at last that there was no possible opening from below, he was about to turn his attention to the wainscoting when a faint sound from one of the rooms downstairs interrupted his work and brought him bolt upright to his knees.

He hastily extinguished the match he was burning, and waited silently in the darkness. Again it came—a sharp, creaking sound, like a door swinging on rusty hinges. Something was evidently astir on the second floor. He feared for a minute that he had disturbed Miss Sargent and that she might be coming upstairs to see what was wrong.

A long interval passed without any repetition of the noise, however, and he concluded at length that he had allowed himself to become alarmed unnecessarily. It was unlikely that his stealthy movements could have been heard, and he concluded that some door had merely shut in a draft. Reassured by this explanation, he turned back to his search of the room. As he resumed his inspection of the wainscoting, however, the door creaked once more, and this time he was certain that he heard a soft tread of feet.

With his senses keyed to the highest pitch, he remained kneeling in the corner of the room, listening to the muffled sounds below. There was no doubt now that some one was awake and moving about on the second floor. As he

waited anxiously, he heard a heavy, measured tramping, as of a person who had started slowly up the stairs and was carefully feeling the way in the darkness.

For an instant Brett believed that Miss Sargent had left her room, and, for some reason, was climbing up to the floor above. But this impression was short-lived. He suddenly realized that her small feet never could come down with such solid and weighty thumps as those that were ascending the stairs. Whoever it was that was coming to visit the upper part of the house, he knew that it could not be the girl.

Brett drew back farther against the wall, and waited with beating pulse. He had not the faintest idea what to expect, but somehow he felt that the mysterious genius of the house was about to reveal itself. Just when or how the disclosure might be made he did not know, nor did he especially care. There was something decidedly material and fleshly in the sound of the oncoming footsteps, and this was enough to give him a complete renewal of self-confidence and courage. Whatever happened now, he was ready.

He heard the intruder pass through the room that Delilah had occupied; tramp on into the alcove beyond, and, without an instant's hesitation, begin to mount the last flight of stairs that led directly to the cupola. With every muscle set, Brett crouched in the corner and strove desperately to see through the gloom.

A huge, shadowy form appeared at the head of the stairway, hovered there an instant, and then moved slowly across the room toward the open window. Brett knew that his opportunity had come, and, springing to his feet, he threw himself recklessly forward.

He collided in the darkness with some heavy, muscular body; but, before his groping fingers could secure their sought-for hold, he was pushed aside,

and flung violently against the wall. There was a sound of harsh breathing, a scuffling of shoe leather, a thud of some soft, yielding weight falling to the floor, and a quick rush of feet across the room to the stairway.

Brett recovered himself in an instant. He heard the heavy steps descend from the cupola and clatter noisily through the room below. Aroused by the fear that the intruder might escape him, he started forward in pursuit, but with his first move he stumbled over some object at his feet and pitched headlong to the floor. He turned in surprise, fumbled in his pocket, and struck a match.

A little cry of wonder and of horror broke from his lips, and his face went deathly pale in the flickering light. Lying beneath the open window was the still, slim figure of a woman. She was muffled to the chin in a long blue dressing gown, and the dark coils of her hair almost concealed her colorless face, but it needed no more than a glance to tell him who she was. He crept to her side and touched her hand, and she neither moved nor spoke. "Miss Sargent!" he whispered, and his voice trembled with anxiety. "Ardath!" She did not answer. He raised her fearfully in his arms, and saw that she was unconscious.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The chapters to follow will appear in the next number of TOP-NOTCH, dated and issued May 15th. This magazine is published twice a month. It comes out on the 1st and 15th. Back numbers can be obtained from news dealers or the publishers.

When He Grew Up

WHAT are you going to do when you grow up, if you don't know how to read, write, and spell?" asked a school-teacher of a lazy, stupid boy.

"I'm going to be a schoolmaster, an' make the boys do all the readin', writin', and spellin'," replied the boy.

Trained to a Fiddle

By
Hugh M^cNeill



CHAPTER I. THE BIG IDEA.

JAYNE came into my room looking as if he were going to shed tears. "Mac," he quavered mournfully, "you've got to keep that Humming Bird away from my basket-ball team. You know how he ruined it last year with his meddling—and now he's begun coming down to practice every day, and this afternoon I caught him trying to string some wires from the baskets! You've simply got to make him let us alone, or we'll disgrace the college again."

I was sorry for Jayne; he took his basket-ball captaincy so seriously that he actually wanted "Peaches" Dunlap to quit the football squad and to come and play guard for him—and Peaches an all-American end, too!

"That's too bad, old man," I said. "But you know The Humming Bird—when he once makes up his mind to meddle with a team, all the king's horses and all the king's men can't stop him. Look at what he did to the football season! I'll do my best, but I guess you'd better make up your mind to face some more trouble."

Jayne gloomed about a while longer, and then went out, looking as though he'd lost his last friend. I felt awfully sorry for him, and pretty mad at Isaac Newton Diefenberger for bothering with him. After shaking up the best football team we ever had at Brunswick, I thought The Humming Bird wouldn't be keen on monkeying with athletics so soon again. But I knew better than to argue with him.

So when he came in, full to the neck with contempt for the unscientific way basket ball was being played, and simply exuding scorn for the lowbrows who had devised the rules so as to exclude most forms of genuine science, I was foolish enough to sympathize with him, although all the time my fingers itched to administer a little good old-fashioned corporal castigation. He raved and raved against the rule makers, until finally I got a great idea. The way to handle The Humming Bird, it struck me suddenly, was to divert his attention so that he wouldn't understand he was being handled. But how? That was the question. I wrinkled my forehead, and tried to think.

"There isn't a single indoor sport that's worthy of the name!" declared Isaac Newton. "Chess and checkers

and debating aren't interesting to watch —” Think of a man's considering checkers a sport!—“basket ball is clumsily unscientific, and so is water polo. All winter long I have to submit to the vexation of seeing men waste their time on silly games that lack every essential element of true sport.”

“Why, then,” I said, suddenly seeing a great light, “why don't you get busy and invent a brand-new indoor game—something that comes up to your idea of what a sport ought to be?”

He stared at me, and I could see he was fairly fascinated by the idea. It flashed over me that if I could interest him in this plan he'd be likely to leave poor Jayne in peace, and I egged him along craftily.

“It makes me tired to see you wasting that brain of yours on these childish games, anyway,” I continued. “It's worthy of better things. You could invent something that would make us anxious to have the football season end and let us get busy on your game instead. Why don't you try it?”

He held out his hand, and I shook it solemnly. “Mac,” he said, “I am not often impressed with the caliber of your mentality, but I must admit that sometimes you have inspirations which amount to positive genius. And this is one of them. I shall adopt the suggestion at once. Basket ball, indeed! Wait till I show them *my* game!”

He was so serious about it that I could hardly keep my face straight until I got outside the door. Then I relieved my feelings in a whoop of laughter which lasted all the way to Jayne's quarters. He could scarcely believe it when I told him how I had rescued his beloved basket-ball squad from the impious machinations of Isaac Newton and his science.

At last I convinced him that he was safe for the present, anyway. He cheered up a little and thanked me, but

when I left he shook his head and sighed mournfully.

“What's the matter now?” I demanded, a little peeved at his failure to appreciate my services. He sighed again.

“It looks all right, Mac,” he said gloomily, “and I'm a million times obliged to you, but—”

“But what?” I snapped.

“But you can't tell what that little highbrow will be up to,” he declared. “I tell you, I've got a feeling that he'll spoil things, somehow. He always does, doesn't he?”

I slammed the door and went away. Some people are born pessimists, and Jayne was about the champion of them all.

CHAPTER II.

THROUGH ROSY LENSES.

ISAAC NEWTON plunged into his new occupation with a zeal which almost interfered with his precious studies. He cluttered up our quarters with samples of every known sort of parlor game; he read a whole library of books on the topic, from a fat one entitled “Sacrificial Sports of the Solomon Islands” to a thin one named “The Play Instinct and Why.” And he investigated a whole lot of fairly common games, like billiards and pool, for instance. The deeper he got into the subject the greater became his contempt for all existing forms of indoor amusements.

He spent a lot of time over one imitation baseball game which fired a rubber marble out of a popgun labeled “Matty” against a little fence marked “Wagner,” and made it bounce back into a net branded “Home Run,” but he finally passed it up as trivial and unspectacular. He fooled around with parlor croquet and parlor golf, and abandoned them in huge disgust; he experimented with parchesi and poker and

ping-pong, and decided that none of them would do. He rather liked one game called pillow-dox, in which you blow a rubber balloon around without touching it, but that didn't quite suit him, either.

By the hour, he explained what he was after. He told me over and over that he wanted a game which required some "digital dexterity"—whatever that may mean—and yet didn't depend upon speed or strength or too much practice. That was the trouble with billiards, for instance, which would have suited him if he hadn't tried to play it and discovered that it takes about ten years to acquire the rudiments of a decent skill at it. He even tried jackstraws, which he said embodied almost all the necessary elements, including a large element of chance, but abandoned them because of the fact that the spectators wouldn't be able to see the fine points of the play.

All of this research occupied him for three or four weeks, while Jayne polished up his basket-ball gang, and finally took them up to Columbia, where they defeated the same crew that had trounced us the year before, thanks to The Humming Bird's magic wire in the baskets, which got twisted so that we couldn't score a goal to save our lives, and Columbia threw baskets to their heart's content.

Jayne felt a whole lot better after that, and even he was beginning to regard me as entitled to pedestal right in between Edison and Tesla, when The Humming Bird made his great discovery. He rushed into my bedroom and dragged me out to inspect it, late one night.

I stood there, shivering, barefooted, and watched him unroll a package from which he took out a little cup and a handful of small disks that looked like miniature poker chips. He put the cup in the middle of the table, scattered the disks around it, and then began

snapping them with a little plectron like the thing mandolin players use. Finally he made one hop up into the cup, and looked up at me, pleased as the cat that ate the canary.

"There!" he said. "That is the ideal sport. I didn't have to invent it—I discovered it all ready for us. Isn't it splendid?"

I was pretty sore at being waked out of a healthy sleep to fool with such nonsense, but I didn't intend to go back on poor Jayne.

"What do you call it?" I said, just as though I wanted to know.

"It's a silly name," said Isaac Newton. "I imagine it is of negro origin. It is called—'Tiddle-de-winks'—I suppose it should be 'Tiddle-the-winks,' but the name makes no difference. From every point of view, Mac, I have here before you the king of indoor sports!"

"I guess you're right, Isaac Newton," I said, trying to look as much impressed as possible. "It strikes me as one little gem of a game, and you're a regular wizard to have dug it up."

He was perfectly foolish with glee at my appreciation. And before he let me climb back into bed he made me listen to a long story about how Tiddle-the-winks was bound to replace all the silly little indoor games that had ever been tried, and become the great American winter sport. I let him rave—there wasn't any use in arguing with him, and I wasn't sure just how the whole thing was going to affect Jayne and his precious team. I wanted a chance to sleep on it before I went any further with my plot.

CHAPTER III.

HEAD OF THE LEAGUE.

THREE were only a few days left before the holidays, and although Isaac Newton started in the very next morning on his campaign for the in-

tribution of tiddle-the-winks as one of Brunswick's major sports, the fellows were leaving for home before the word got out among the students as a mass.

But Shark Poofer and Poler Jiggs and a lot of that crowd took to it like ducks to water. The Humming Bird had a bunch of them in the rooms all the time—except, of course, for classes—working out the science of the game and devising a set of rules for team play, which they solemnly wrote out in words of seven syllables, describing exactly how many centimeters in length the tiddle might be, and the exact weight limit, in milligrams, of each and every wink!

I nearly expired from trying to keep my face straight while they deliberated, and Peaches and Breath Whickert and Jayne and the rest of the conspirators nearly laughed themselves sick over my descriptions of it. Then we all went home for the holidays, and forgot all about it till we came back.

The day after I got in, I found The Humming Bird deep in a pile of letters, which he was answering with a great deal of care. I asked him what it all meant, as he usually didn't bother much with correspondence.

"These are the replies to my challenges," he said importantly.

"Challenges? What challenges?" I demanded, and he pushed some of the letters across the desk.

"See for yourself," he said impatiently. "Don't interrupt me—this is very important."

I could hardly believe my eyes. There was a letter from the chairman of the athletic committee at Yale, addressed to Isaac N. Diefenberger, Captain Tiddle-the-winks team, Brunswick University, solemnly accepting The Humming Bird's invitation to send a tiddle-the-winks team down to compete with ours under the rules of the Intercollegiate Tiddle-the-winks League, on April 1,

1915! And a week later Harvard promised to be on hand! Other games were scheduled with Penn and Cornell, and The Humming Bird was actually contemplating one with Michigan!

"How on earth are you going to get the money to finance all this?" I asked. "It'll cost a lot of coin to bring these teams here—who's going to put it up?"

He smiled in his condescending fashion. "Why the athletic committee, of course," he said. "Tiddle-the-winks has been officially adopted as a recognized sport, and as such the committee has already voted it a sum sufficient to cover all our expenses for apparatus, traveling, and incidentals."

"The committee's gone crazy!" I gasped. "Real money for tiddle-the-winks, when they wouldn't give us a measly little three thousand for new shells last spring!"

The Humming Bird grinned. "You forget that the committee is composed of members of the faculty, Mac," he said. "Professor Smith is a very good friend of mine, and he is intensely interested in tiddle-the-winks—he plays a perfectly magnificent game himself. You ought to see him—he's a genius with the tiddle, and no wink seems to have terrors for him!"

"And you're actually going to have intercollegiate matches in this thing?" I demanded. "Where?"

"In the gymnasium, of course," said The Humming Bird. "The seating arrangements there will be adequate to accommodate the spectators, and the lighting is excellent, too."

"Spectators!" I gasped. "Do you mean to say you expect anybody to come and watch you play tiddle-the-winks?"

"Anybody," said The Humming Bird calmly, "who has seventy-five cents with which to buy a ticket!"

I let him dream on—I didn't have the heart to wake him up.

From that time on the tiddle-the-

winks squad enjoyed all the privileges of the other college teams. They had lockers in the gym, space for their tables, eye shades, thumb guards, all sizes and shapes of tiddles, and fifty-seven different varieties of winks. Half the faculty used to watch the practice, and "Nosey" Smith, who was famous for his hatred of all forms of athletics, actually coached the varsity team in person.

Of course, The Humming Bird, as the discoverer of the sport and the founder of the league, had to be on the varsity, and I must admit that he deserved his place; the way he could make those little chips hop into the cup was wonderful, especially when one saw how hard it was for the rest of the team to do it.

Time after time Shark Poofer, who was the next best player, would miss his tiddle, but Isaac Newton hardly ever did. The winks would jump up in the air under his tiddling as though he had trained them. It wasn't bad fun to watch them, even for me, and it got to be such a fad in college to watch the tiddle-the-winks practice that the crew coach entered a complaint with the committee, saying that he couldn't get a squad together because all the men were either trying for the tiddle-wink team or watching it practice! Think of it!

Well, by the time the first big game came along—Yale, it was—The Humming Bird had developed as deft a lot of tiddlers as you'd want to see, and trained them to a tiddle. No one on the squad was allowed to sit up after midnight to study, and participation in all other forms of athletics was rigidly prohibited, too, because Isaac Newton claimed that muscular development lessened a man's delicacy of touch with the tiddle.

I don't know, of course, how it was at Yale, but they must have been interested almost as much as we were, for a whole crowd of rooters came

along with their team, wearing blue ribbons and escorting girls with big bunches of violets, for all the world like a football-game day. And what's more, they wanted to bet on the game, too, and tried to get us to offer odds by telling how their center tiddle had sprained his wrist, and their right wink had developed a case of pink eye, and wouldn't be able to last the game out. It was exactly as they send out the calamity reports during football season, till you get yourself convinced that everybody in New Haven is in the infirmary, and then have to walk home because you allowed yourself to bet on it!

We were wise, though. I knew better than to risk my money on any sport. The Humming Bird was mixed up in, and only a few of the hottest sports put up anything on our team, although Isaac Newton swore to me by all the academic gods that there was nothing to it but a Brunswick landslide. He was so certain of winning that I suddenly got suspicious.

"Have you been ringing in any of your scientific stuff, Hum?" I demanded, watching him narrowly. "Any hidden springs or psychology stunts due to come off to-night?"

He just grinned knowingly. "As I invented the sport and wrote the rules myself," he hinted, "it seems reasonable to suppose that I did not bar out inventive ability, doesn't it? You wait and see!"

And that was all I could get out of him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WINNING WINK.

THE gym was packed. Beside the big Yale delegation and the visiting girls, every student in Brunswick who could borrow seventy-five cents was holding down one of the seats in the temporary grand stands erected each

fall for the basket-ball team, and the running track overhead was just crammed with reserved seats at a large round dollar apiece!

The athletic treasurer was all smiles, and told me, as I went in, that the receipts had already repaid the expenses of the team! Brunswick had gone tiddle-wink crazy—that was all there was to it!

According to the rules devised by The Humming Bird, the game was played on a long green-covered table, set up in the center of the gym floor, with shaded lights suspended above it. Yale had one side of the table, and we had the other. There were five men on each side, a center tiddle, a right and left tiddle, and a right and left wink. The winks were arranged in a line in front of the right winks and left winks, who sat at the opposite ends of the table—about six feet from the cup.

Play began when Poofer, playing right wink for us, tiddled the first wink clear up to the cup on a splendid shot. The Yale left wink, playing opposite to him, tried to equal his performance, but only succeeded in dropping his wink in front of the left tiddle, and it was The Humming Bird's next shot for Brunswick. He snapped the wink plump into the cup, while the Yale tiddle managed to give his wink only a short relay along to the Yale tiddle, our left wink, in his turn, shooting his first disk clear up to the cup just as Poofer had done.

That gives an idea of how the game is played—each side getting a shot in turn, and the winks working in from the ends of the table toward the cup. A good long tiddle-off, therefore, meant that the center tiddle would get a shot for the cup on the next play, while a short tiddle-off might necessitate two or three intermediate tiddles before the wink went home. Each side had to cage six winks, three from each end, and the first to get all its winks home

won the game. Six games made a set, and the best three out of five sets made the match.

Well, that match was a simple rout! Not once did the Yale end winks succeed in propelling their tiddle-offs far enough for their center tiddle to make his goal play on the second shot. Always they had to be relayed along by the middle tiddlers, while our end winks several times cupped the wink on the tiddle-off, and never failed once to lay the wink within easy distance of the cup, where Isaac Newton could shoot it home on the next play.

Although it was a walk-over for Brunswick, I'm bound to admit it was exciting, and I yelled as loud as any of them when the first half ended with our side already two straight sets to the good.

During the intermission, though, I felt a little foolish, and walked out for a breath of fresh air, a trifle ashamed of myself for yielding to the fascination of such a silly child's game. Right outside the door I bumped into Jayne. Even in the darkness I could see that he was mad, and I stopped to see what on earth was the matter with him.

"Don't speak to me, you big brute!" he snapped.

I was astonished. "Why, what have you got against me?" I expostulated.

"You put The Humming Bird up to this wretched game," said Jayne.

"Well, what if I did?" I asked, puzzled. "Didn't I save your precious basket-ball squad by doing it?"

"Save it! Save it!" he wailed. "Why, you dolt, don't you know what's happened? The committee has abolished basket ball and disbanded the team, because they say one indoor sport is enough, and they need the gym for the tiddle-wink games! And, anyway, all the basket-ball squad had gone out for the tiddle-wink team, and I couldn't have got five men to play, no matter what the committee did!"

And poor old Jayne almost sobbed outright in the depth of his grief. I couldn't cheer him up, try as I would, until I finally thought of a bright idea: I borrowed seventy-five cents of Smead and bought Jayne a ticket. He sat watching the second half like a man who's seen a great white light. And before the third set was half over he was screeching away like a lunatic. The game wound up in a wild uproar of frenzied cheering, and I heard him yelling "Diefenberger! Diefenberger!" at the top of his lungs.

"You don't hate The Humming Bird any more, do you?" I said, a little annoyed at him for his sudden switch. He scowled at me superciliously.

"Hate him?" he snapped. "He's a wonder! As a Brunswick man, I'm proud of him! Did you see the perfectly splendid play he made at the end? Think of it! From the eight-inch line, with a bad angle against him, to tiddle the winning wink for Brunswick!"

CHAPTER V.

WHEN SCIENCE AIDS.

OH," said The Humming Bird airily, "it was nothing very wonderful! I claim none of the credit for the victory. It was all a matter of cold science, Mac, and science always wins!"

"I thought so!" I exclaimed. "You rang in some of your underhand, scientific cheating, did you, after all? I should think you'd be ashamed, Hum! Don't you understand that that sort of thing isn't fair?"

"Did you examine the table?" said Isaac Newton. "I thought I saw you look at the legs and bottom of it before the game. Did you see any evidence of concealed wiring, or anything else that struck you as unfair?"

"No, I didn't," I said. "But you've just admitted that you played some low-down, scientific trick to win. What was it this time?"

Isaac Newton smiled condescendingly and threw me a couple of clippings. One was a copy of his own tiddle-wink rules. "Do you see that paragraph which says that the winks may be made of any material whatever—wood, celluloid, rubber, or metal?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Well, ours were celluloid—Yale's had a little chunk of steel in the center—that's all. And the rules specifically allow that. Is that unfair—the weight being the same in each case?"

"No," I said slowly. "But what's this other clipping—the Bartender's Life-saver? What's the bartender got to do with this?"

"Read the advertisement," said Isaac Newton. "I found it in a saloon trade journal. It explains a simple magnetic contrivance by which the bartender can control the fall of loaded dice—many saloons employ it, I am told, to save them the free drinks they would otherwise lose."

"But there were no wires on that table," I protested. "I can swear to that. And you can't work a thing like that without wires!"

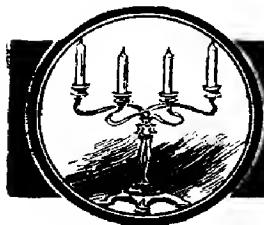
"That's because you don't know Professor Smith well enough," said The Humming Bird. "He suggested that we cover our tables with an iron plate below the green baize. We did. And we took the liberty of magnetizing the plate permanently first. The rules do not prohibit it, Mac. I wrote them myself. Science, rightly applied, always wins, Mac; even in a highly sporting game like tiddle-the-winks!"

A Model Husband

PARISH VISITOR—to Mrs. McTavish, who has been complaining about her husband's laziness: "But I've always understood that yours was a model husband."

Mrs. McTavish: "So he is, miss, but no' a working model."

Tartas the Terrible



by

H. Hesketh Prichard

DINNER had just commenced for the Baron de Tartas. He sat alone in front of a heavy table; a single attendant stood behind his chair. From time to time he lifted his dark, bearded face and laughed as a man does who enjoys a cynical recollection, but there was no mirth in the laughter nor any glint of humor in the hard, black eyes.

"Pierre!" he called..

"Yes, monsieur le baron," was the reply.

"I grow lonely. I must have company."

"Yes, monsieur le baron," came the same reply.

"Is the Comte André de Lavelle at home?" asked the baron.

"Yes, monsieur le baron," repeated the man, with a grin.

"Then I shall be glad of his company."

Pierre crossed the room and touched, or seemed to touch, a spring in the wall, for a panel backed with iron, on which was painted a scene of the chase, slipped back, disclosing an aperture behind it. Across the mouth of this aperture, which evidently belonged to a secret chamber, thick iron bars showed in the lamplight.

"Light monsieur le comte's lantern," ordered De Tartas.

Pierre picked up a taper, and in another moment he had kindled a light which threw the whole interior into relief. An iron cage had been introduced into the secret chamber, and from between its bars a human face peered forth through a thatch of hair and beard uncut for months.

The Baron de Tartas rose in his place and bowed low. "Permit me to greet you, my dear comte," said he.

"You devil!" was the count's response.

"Tut, tut, this is very foolish! But I will pass it over since you are so young. Let me see, how old are you?" The man in the cage made no reply. "Let me see: You were twenty-three when—"

"When you betrayed and trapped me!" put in the prisoner.

"And you have enjoyed my hospitality for just eleven months. You are, therefore, twenty-four years old. By the way, Pierre, when did monsieur le comte dine last?"

"On Tuesday, monsieur le baron," said Pierre.

"And this is Thursday!" exclaimed the baron. "Tut, tut, he must be hungry! Take him a cup of this excellent soup, Pierre."

Pierre did as he was bidden, and passed a cup of soup through the bars.

The wretched prisoner seized it and swallowed the liquid.

"You love life," sneered the baron, watching him.

"While I live I hope!" said the count.

"For what, my good fool?" was the next question.

"That some day—some day you may lie at my mercy!"

The baron laughed long and loudly. "You are of a sanguine disposition," he remarked; then, turning to Pierre: "Go! I desire a tête-à-tête with monsieur."

As soon as they were alone, the baron helped himself to a huge grilled bone. When he had cut off the greater part of the meat, he caught up the bone and hurled it at the man in the cage. "There!" he cried. "Feast, and be merry."

The bone struck the bars and fell to the ground. The Baron de Tartas, with his eyes fixed on the prisoner, continued his dinner. Dish after dish he ate and pushed away. Then at last he poured out a great bumper of wine and drained it.

"And now," said he, as he set it down, "I have news for you, my dear comte. I saw mademoiselle to-day. She is more beautiful than ever."

The prisoner in the cage, who had been sitting facing his tormentor, turned his back deliberately. De Tartas smiled. "It may interest you to know that I asked her whether she had changed her mind, and would become my wife."

The man in the cage sprang up. "And she refused! I know it. She refused with contempt and scorn!"

"Not at all, my dear André; you are wrong. She accepted—on one condition."

"What was that condition?" asked the prisoner.

"A condition which she thought impossible, but which we know is by no means so," replied his tormentor smoothly. "She imagines that you are

not dead, and declares she will never accept me until she hears you renounce her with your own lips."

"I will die first!" cried the count.

"No doubt, my young friend; but, unfortunately for you, it is not a question of dying but of living—ten, twenty—perhaps thirty—years like a blackbird in that comfortable cage. You fool! On the day when first I saw you cast your eyes on Adrienne, I had this chamber prepared. On the day she consented to marry you the cage was placed in it. Twenty days later my men waylaid you as you rode, singing, through the woods. As to Adrienne, she does not know what has become of you any more than the rest of the world, always excepting the good Pierre and myself. But one day she *shall* know—one day!"

The baron laughed suddenly and harshly. "Ah, if she saw you now what would she think of you? Would she love you still? You have changed from the debonair creature she remembers! The curling, dark hair, the clear, bronzed cheeks, where are they? But I forget! You have not seen yourself!"

De Tartas seized a mirror, and, crossing the floor, held it up to the cage. In it André saw reflected a thing hardly human, a wolfish face snarling from a mass of tangled hair. He recoiled.

"You give me an idea. She shall see you!" cried De Tartas. "She shall see you! Will she rush into your arms, I wonder, as she did under the chestnut trees?"

II.

THE Baron de Tartas could climb, on the clearest day, to the highest tower of his castle, and north, south, east, and west, as far as he could see, stretched his own land; and over its cowering inhabitants he held the right of the high justice, the middle, and the low. Far from the capital, and shut in by his mountains and forests, he lived

practically the life of a robber chief-tain, a last survivor of those the fear of whom once lay heavy upon the country-side. He was indeed a terrible man, and at sight of his cold eyes and pointed beard the children slunk into the thickets, and their parents trembled in the sunlight.

De Tartas was forty-three years old when first he saw Adrienne de Carteret, and from that hour he set himself to win her. Apart from her great beauty, she was well worth the winning, for she possessed broad lands in her own right. Her father was dead, and she lived with her mother in the Château of Noirmont.

At first De Tartas, who could be very pleasant when he so desired, had seemed to make some headway in her good graces, but at the coming of the young Comte de Lavelle all was changed.

The handsome youth, who possessed nothing but a few hundred barren acres in one of the farther of the Pyrenean valleys, came and saw and conquered, and was conquered in his turn. De Tartas found himself slighted, as he conceived, and forgotten, as he most truly was. And then, one day young De Lavelle had gone hunting in the dark mountain woods, and from that hunt he never returned. For De Tartas' men had waylaid and captured him after a desperate fight, and he was thrust, bleeding and wounded, into the cage which had been prepared for him.

A story was circulated afterward by the retainers of the baron that Lavelle had been slain by a bear; but, of course, his body was not recovered, and Adrienne continued to hope against hope that one day he would return to her.

After a decent interval, De Tartas renewed his suit, but Adrienne would not listen to him, exclaiming that if André were dead, she would die unmarried. And when De Tartas hinted that the young man had loved and ridden away, she swore she would never believe that

André was fickle until she heard him renounce her with his own lips.

Such was the position of affairs on the summer evening when the baron held the mirror to his prisoner's eyes.

III.

THE Baron de Tartas rode out from his castle gate and struck across the hills for Noirmont. He had made up his mind to try a new move in his game, and he passed slowly and thoughtfully through winding valleys, along forested hillsides, and stony ravines, till the sun was high, and he found himself overlooking a green hollow beyond which rose the heights of Noirmont—the dark mountain that gave its name to Adrienne's home. This was a huge castellated building that stood out boldly upon one of the lower spurs of the mountain.

As De Tartas urged his horse up the steep roadway to the gate, he argued with himself that fate, who favors the brave, should, by all the rules of chance, be with him in the daring bid for success that he was about to make. He believed that he had fathomed Adrienne's character, gauged her strength and her weakness; and on this knowledge he relied.

She came through the shadows of the vaulted hall to meet him, and he trembled as he bent over her hand and kissed it, for his hopes were risen high, and he was shaken by the thought that this beautiful girl soon might be his wife.

She shuddered, and withdrew her hand, but looked straight at him with eyes as deeply blue as the summer sky. From the folds of lace crossed upon her bosom, her round neck rose proudly, its ivory accentuated by the splendor of her dark hair.

"Am I, then, so hateful to you?" he asked, stepping back a pace as if to make her look at him.

And, in fact, he was a personable

man, for though no taller than herself, he had the torso and shoulders of a Hercules, his lean, large-featured face was far from uncomely, and once he had fancied that she had looked with kindness on him.

She shook her head slightly, as if his question needed no answer. "My mother is sleeping; she is wearied and ill," she said.

"It is you, mademoiselle, with whom I must speak," he replied. "Is it not time you ceased to mourn for Monsieur de Lavelle?"

"I must always mourn for him," said Adrienne.

"I can bear that, but give yourself to me!" pleaded the baron. "The years must teach you comfort; the law of the world is the law of change."

"I have told you that I do not believe that he is dead, and that I will never give him up until his own lips disclaim my promise."

"In that case, I have news for you," said De Tartas.

The blood slowly left her face. "He is alive?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the baron.

"I have always felt it." For a moment she stood, too moved to speak; then the words came: "Who told you? How did you find out? Where is he?"

De Tartas smiled as he watched her with his cold eyes. "You are asking a great many questions, mademoiselle. In my turn, I will ask you one only. It is this: Why should I tell you?"

She turned a gaze of horror upon him. He wilted a little under its reproach.

"Mademoiselle," he continued, "every man must fight for his own hand, since there is never another to fight for him. And you know that, though Monsieur de Lavelle is so fortunate as to possess your love to-day, I still have hopes."

"Which can never be fulfilled," said the girl coldly.

"Exactly—which you say can never

be fulfilled. But what if I were to find a way to change your resolves, perhaps even your affections?"

"It is not possible," she told him.

"Will you permit me to make the attempt?" asked De Tartas.

"To what end? No, monsieur le baron, I will not permit you to make the attempt, seeing it would be useless."

"You forget that if you refuse to accept my terms you will hear no more of Monsieur de Lavelle," suggested her suitor.

She looked at him with loathing and contempt. "What are your terms?" she asked.

"Come to my château and I will answer your questions, and tell you all I know of the whereabouts of the Comte de Lavelle," promised the baron.

"My mother is not well enough to make the journey," parried Adrienne.

"There is no need for her to do so. You must come alone; you can return before dawn."

"You ask me to come at night, and in secret!" exclaimed the girl in astonishment. "You know it is impossible; I will not!"

"Pierre shall meet you in the valley and bring you back again," said De Tartas.

Then, as she stared at him, the baron bowed low before her. "I go, mademoiselle," said he, "but I will return tomorrow. If you do not then agree to my condition, you will never hear of your lover again!"

IV.

ADRIENNE met De Tartas on the terrace, when he came again. "Do you mean to trust me?" he asked.

"How can I be certain that it is not all a lie, this news you promised me of Monsieur de Lavelle?" she said uncertainly.

"By this." De Tartas put his hand to his breast and drew out a miniature.

Adrienne could not suppress a cry; it was a likeness of herself which she had given to De Lavelle after their betrothal. "He is dead! He never would have parted with this while he lived!"

"I swear to you that he lives, mademoiselle, and I will add this—it may be that he is in danger. He may, perhaps, be saved if—"

"I will come to-night!" she interrupted hastily.

"That is well," approved the baron. "The moon rises in good time. It will show you the path along the valley, and Pierre shall be waiting for you by the Dent-du-Chat. Au revoir, mademoiselle."

The Baron de Tartas strode into his gloomy hall. He had been watching for the last two hours from his battlements, and had just seen, under the Dent-du-Chat, the flicker of the little beacon which he had ordered Pierre to light as a signal that Adrienne was on her way.

In the hall a sumptuous feast was laid out upon the table. A roast lamb stood at one end faced by a young swan of which the baron kept many pinioned upon his waters. Dishes of fruit and beakers of wine glinted and shone in the flaring lights. De Tartas glanced at the preparations and nodded his head in satisfaction; then he stepped across and touched the spring which rolled back the secret panel, and disclosed the cage upon the straw-strewn floor of which crouched De Lavelle.

"Ah, my dear comte!" said he. "You will perceive that my table is laid for two."

The prisoner did not move. De Tartas laughed. "I doubt if even your quick intelligence could guess the name of the visitor I am about to have the honor of entertaining."

Still the prisoner did not move. Many a time had De Tartas tortured him with the sight of food.

"It is just eleven o'clock," continued the baron. "Eleven at night, for I suppose it is necessary to add that—since except when in my great mercy I push back the panel, you pass your time like a mole in the darkness."

Still the prisoner lay inert upon the straw.

"Ah!" said the baron. "I see that I must tell you exactly what has occurred. Yesterday I did myself the honor of visiting Mademoiselle Adrienne and of telling her that I had news of you."

"You told her that!" said the prisoner in a hollow voice.

"Yes, indeed!" said the baron. "And I added that if she would come here to-night I would communicate this news."

"Adrienne here to-night!" cried the prisoner.

The baron laughed. "Does not her coming rejoice you? Will she not be overjoyed to meet you once again? Can you doubt it, since you have seen yourself as you now are? She, who is so proud, so fastidious. But enough of that; when you see her, you will tell her that you no longer love her, and that you give her back her promise. If you do this, you shall be set free before morning."

"And if I refuse?" demanded the prisoner.

"Why, then we shall enjoy ourselves together for many years to come—you and I. Be wise, my dear comte; the sunshine and the winds are so very pleasant. Not that the choice will be a very difficult one, for she will spurn you and loathe you. But there are one or two details concerning the reasons which have caused me to put you in this cage that I shall expect you to corroborate. First, then, I captured you not because Mademoiselle Adrienne loved you and I loved Mademoiselle Adrienne—oh, no! But because, although you were betrothed to her, you were paying your addresses to Diane l'Oiseau, the

daughter of one of my foresters. I, hearing of this, and being naturally and righteously enraged at your perfidy, seized you and punished you. Do you understand?"

"You wish me to acknowledge and bear witness to the truth of these lies before Mademoiselle de Carteret? You forget that she will question this Diane," said the count scornfully.

"She will say anything that I tell her," the baron assured him. "Understand that. You have your choice. It is not a hard one. On the one side freedom, on the other such a life as few have endured since the beginning of the world. Ah, that must be Pierre. They have come!"

The baron's quick ear had caught the sound of horses in the courtyard. He pressed the spring, and the panel shot forward, hiding the cage.

Soon after, Pierre threw open the door. "It is mademoiselle," said he.

"Good! Go! Wait with the horses in the courtyard. See that they are fed."

Meantime, Adrienne had advanced into the room. Pale though she was, she made a beautiful picture, with her blue eyes and her raven hair against the dark and rugged background of the somber hall of De Tartas, who kissed her hand with an exaggeration of respect.

"You will eat after your ride?" said he. "See, I have drawn upon all the resources of my poor estate."

"I am grateful," replied Adrienne, "but I am not hungry. I have come here for a purpose. I desire to fulfill that purpose and then depart."

"Tut, tut!" cried the baron. "I shall take it ill if you thus refuse my hospitality on this, your first visit to my poor château. Come, sit down and taste some of this swan that has fattened in a lake surrounded by chestnut trees, and on the shores of which are beds of wild celery."

Adrienne sighed, and the two took their seats at the table.

V.

THE baron had arranged the lights so that they fell full upon his visitor's lovely face, from which, even as he ate and drank, he hardly removed his eyes. Again and again Adrienne tried to lead the conversation in the direction that she desired, but the baron baffled her with his laughter and his boasting of his woods and his deer, and of the bears and wolves he had slain—for the man was a great hunter, and, after his infatuation for Adrienne, the chase was the passion of his life.

At length, however, the meal was over, and Adrienne broke out: "Have you lured me here with a lie, that you evade all my questions?"

"Your pardon, mademoiselle," he answered courteously. "I am sorry if I have offended you. I will make immediate reparation. You desire to know many things concerning Monsieur de Lavelle. You shall know them all. First, then, I have the honor to inform you that Monsieur de Lavelle is here, and has been here during the last eleven months."

"What!" cried Adrienne. "This is incredible! Why have you kept him hidden?"

"For a very good reason, mademoiselle. I must ask you to listen to the facts of the case. They are simple. You will hear me?"

Adrienne inclined her head.

"You must know, then, that from the day I saw you I loved you. No, no, mademoiselle, do not interrupt me"—for Adrienne had made a movement of anger—"it is all part of what I have to tell you. I say that I loved you, and until the coming of this De Lavelle, it may be that you looked not unkindly upon me. But before long I realized that for you there was but one man in the world, and, mademoiselle, such was

my love for you that I was willing it should be so, provided I could assure myself that that man was indeed worthy of the great good fortune which had befallen him.

"Once I was assured of this, I decided that I would wish you happiness for the last time, and retire here to my hunting and solitude and my memories of you. But I am the lord of no small domain, and whatever may occur within my marches comes to my ears sooner or later—generally sooner, dear mademoiselle.

"And now my men told me that you were not the only woman for André de Lavelle. There lives over yonder"—the baron waved his hand to the east—"a certain forester, Jean l'Oiseau. He has a daughter, Diane is her name, of whose beauty even you in your Château of Noirmont may have heard. Well, they told me that your betrothed, when he left you, rode straight to the hut in the forest and spent the evenings of the days he passed with you wandering through the woods, his arm around her, and his black locks mingled with her golden ones."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" asked Adrienne scornfully.

"You will believe it before you leave this hall," the baron assured her. "But let me continue: When I learned of De Lavelle's treachery, rage overpowered me, and at first it was in my mind to ride to you. I should have done so had I not realized, and rightly, it seems, that you would laugh me to scorn. So I thought of another way in which I might save you. Near the hut of Jean, the forester, I placed an ambush, and presently the fox was in the trap. His lips were upon Diane's when they captured him, and dragged him before me. He flung himself upon the ground and begged me to keep silence. Yes, he offered to renounce you if I would let him go, but my wrath was to be meas-

ured only by my love, and, swayed by it, I cast him into prison."

"And then—then?" asked the girl breathlessly.

"I treated him as he deserved. Did I do right?" said De Tartas.

"You left me without word of him all these months!" she cried.

"For your own sake. I knew how painful it would be to you to realize that you had been betrothed to a creature so unworthy—a traitor."

"I thank you, but I condemn no man unheard," said mademoiselle proudly. "You say that André is imprisoned here; I must see him and permit him to defend himself."

"I was about to suggest that you should do so," returned the baron smoothly.

She had been far from expecting this easy acquiescence. "In that case, the sooner the better. Shall I accompany you?" she added, for the baron had risen.

"There is no need. I keep him close to me, and watch over him very carefully." With these words, De Tartas left the table and walked slowly across the hall.

When he arrived opposite the secret spring, he turned and faced Adrienne, who was following his movements with a gaze of mingled agony and expectation. Then, as he touched it, the panel drew back into its socket. De Tartas lifted a lamp.

"There!" cried he. "There is the traitor who insulted you!"

The figure in the cage rose to its knees, blinking, for the sudden change from utter darkness to light rendered him blind for a moment. The next he seized the bars of the cage, shaking and tearing at them like some imprisoned animal.

Adrienne stood still. The horror of the moment completely deprived her of the power of speech. At last words came: "Who is this? *Who* is this?"

"You do not recognize Comte André de Lavelle?" mocked De Tartas.

"Oh, it cannot be! It is impossible! André! André! It is not you—it cannot be you!" she cried.

"Adrienne, it is indeed I!" came André's voice.

Adrienne turned on De Tartas. "You have done this, this! There is no word I know that would describe you!"

"All for your sake, mademoiselle," said the baron. "You forget that; and you have not questioned him. Ask him of the kisses he gave to Diane l'Oiseau, and of how he confessed to me that he cared not for you, but for your possessions."

"André," cried Adrienne, "tell me this is not true. I know you too well; it is a lie, a wild invention. Tell me, and I will believe you. Oh, my André, my poor André, tell me!"

"Your André!" repeated the man in the cage. "Do you mean that? He said you would turn from me with hatred and disgust, that you would loathe the sight of me, who have no longer the appearance of a human being."

"Bah!" cried the baron. "You see how he shirks an answer. If you do not answer at once I will press this spring."

"Then I will answer, most noble Ambrose, Baron de Tartas, and high seigneur of Jaurac," replied the prisoner contemptuously. "You have said that I walked in the woods with Diane l'Oiseau, and that I renounced the Lady Adrienne in my fear of what you might do to me in your righteous indignation. I will answer, oh, yes, I will answer that charge. Diane I never heard of till an hour ago, when you told me that if I acknowledged my love for her I should be free before dawn. As to the renunciation which you commanded me to make, I have this to say: I love the Lady Adrienne and her only, and her I will continue to love until death!"

The baron sprang forward. "Do you understand what you say?" he cried. Then, seeing in Adrienne's eyes how utterly his plan had miscarried, he broke into uncontrollable rage. "Do you realize that the words you have spoken condemn you to spend the rest of your life where you are?"

"I shall at least have the sweet memory of your chagrin to keep me company," said the prisoner.

"Have no fear, André, I will raise the countryside. I will rescue you!" cried Adrienne.

The baron smiled. "The castle can stand a two years' siege," said he, "even if you can prevail upon people to come and besiege it, which I think you will find it hard to do. Besides, I will deny that Monsieur de Lavelle is here."

"And I will tell every one that I saw him myself," said the girl.

"Do not forget to add the fact that the hour at which you saw him was in the middle of the night, and that you came alone of your own free will to the Château de Tartas!" the baron reminded her.

A haughty smile crossed Adrienne's features. "Can you imagine that I will shrink from telling the whole truth?" said she.

"Adrienne! Adrienne! You give me courage to die, not once, but many times," cried André.

"You will need it," said the baron grimly. "And now, mademoiselle, my last word: Wed me, and this man shall have his liberty. Refuse, and return home, and when you lie upon your bed, think that he and I are together, and that some of the old implements of torture, which my ancestors used so wisely, are still to be found in my castle. Those thoughts will give you pleasant dreams. And now I will leave you to talk it over and to make your choice. You shall have ten minutes together. I will wait in the next room."

VI.

THE moment they were alone, Adrienne rushed forward and caught the hand which André had thrust through the bars, and covered it with kisses.

"There is no one like you in the world, Adrienne!" he told her.

"Can I not free you?" she asked.

"No, he carries the key upon his person."

"It may be possible to break the padlock," suggested Adrienne frantically.

"To do so would need the strength of six men, and is far beyond yours. Adrienne, how did you find the courage to come here? Do you realize the risks you have run for my sake?"

"I am running no risks," she said calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"I have a vial of poison. I brought it in case—in case he should refuse to let me go."

"Poison!" whispered André. "You have a vial of poison? Where?"

"In my bosom."

"Then I pray you to put some of it in a cup of wine and give it to me. Once I am dead, his threats will have no power for you."

But Adrienne's eyes were blazing with a light that André de Lavelle had never seen there before. She crossed swiftly to the table, and lifted the great flagon of Tarragona wine that stood upon it. From this she poured out a cup, and then, shielding the flagon with her body from any gaze which might be turned upon it from the direction of the door, she emptied into it the vial of poison. Next, with a firm step, she went to the door and called out the name of the baron.

It was a full minute before he came, for he had gone to give some orders to Pierre. As he entered the hall, Adrienne spoke. "I have decided," said she.

"And your decision?" asked her host.

"That I will marry you when and where you wish," and, lifting the cup of Tarragona wine, she drank it to its dregs. "And so I pledge you, my lord and master!"

The baron stared for a moment; then, springing forward, he filled a cup from the great flagon, and, turning to his prisoner, who was clinging to the bars and pressing his bearded face against them, he shouted: "She comes readily to my arms; does she not, my most dear comte? I drink, I drink deep to the loveliest of wives!"

De Tartas placed the cup, empty, upon the table; then, seized with a new thought, he filled it again.

"And you, too, shall drink—you, too!" he cried, and he handed it through the bars of the cage.

André de Lavelle took it and held it up as if about to drink.

For a moment, Adrienne's heart stood still, for she had no idea how long the poison would need for its work, and she knew that, did the baron suspect anything, all hope would be over. But De Lavelle was equal to the occasion. With a wild gesture, he dashed the cup to the floor of his cage.

"I do not drink from the cup that has been touched by the lips of a traitor!"

The baron laughed. "As you wish. Those lips have other work to do," he said, and advanced toward Adrienne.

She shrank back from him, and then, as he still came on, she saw that his steps were not steady and that his eyes were filled with a strange wildness. He caught her in his arms. She struggled, fighting him off. Suddenly, without warning, his jaws snapped together, and he fell forward upon his face.

"He carries the key in his belt," said the prisoner.

In a moment more, Adrienne had opened the cage, and, blessing her name, André de Lavelle crept across the threshold. It was the first time for

eleven months, so he could not stand upright, but shambled round the hall with uncouth and hesitating paces.

He came to the body of the baron. "He is not dead!" he cried. "See! He moves!" De Tartas' eyes were open and his hands groped feebly. De Lavelle bent over him. "He is recovering! The poison was much diluted in the great flagon," he cried again. "Ah! Heaven is not unjust, after all!"

He plucked the pistol from the baron's belt and put it in the breast of his own shirt; afterward, with a strength born of fury which none could have believed him to possess, he dragged De Tartas to the cage and thrust him into it, locking the door upon him. Then he touched the secret spring, and the panel shot back.

"However loudly he shouts, he will not be heard. The triple iron deadens all sound."

"Quick, André, let us leave this dreadful place!" cried Adrienne.

"Where are the horses?" he asked.

"Pierre is waiting with them in the courtyard."

Swiftly they passed down the stair, and stood in the shadow of the arch. In the courtyard they could see two horses tied to rings in the wall, but Pierre was not visible. They ran across, untied the bridles, and mounted.

"Away, Adrienne, my darling. Ride on!" said André. "I follow!"

Without a word, Adrienne turned her horse down the steep incline from the castle gate, and soon they were flying along the track between the chestnut trees.

André de Lavelle watched until a bend in the road hid her from his sight. Then he lifted up his voice and shouted: "Pierre!"

"Coming, Monsieur le Baron, coming!" called out a voice, and a man, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, ran out from a firelit doorway in which he had been snoring.

De Lavelle, wrapped in the baron's cloak, sat in the saddle with the pistol aimed carefully over the crook of his arm. At the shot Pierre fell. Then Lavelle gave rein to his horse, and galloped after Adrienne.

By dawn two of the three human beings alive who knew the secret of the cage were nearing Noirmont. The third was beating the bars with bleeding hands and screaming: "Pierre! Pierre! Pierre!"

But Pierre came not, and the thick walls held their secret for many a year.

On the Right Side

I SAW a man once," said a well-known humorist, "fall off the top window sill in a building twenty stories high. Never hurt himself a bit—just annoyed, that was all."

"Nonsense!" cried his companion. "The thing is impossible."

"Fact!" said the humorist. "Up there he was, cleaning the window, and he fell right off. He got up and went back to his work."

"That's absurd!" exclaimed the other man. "Tell me how he did it."

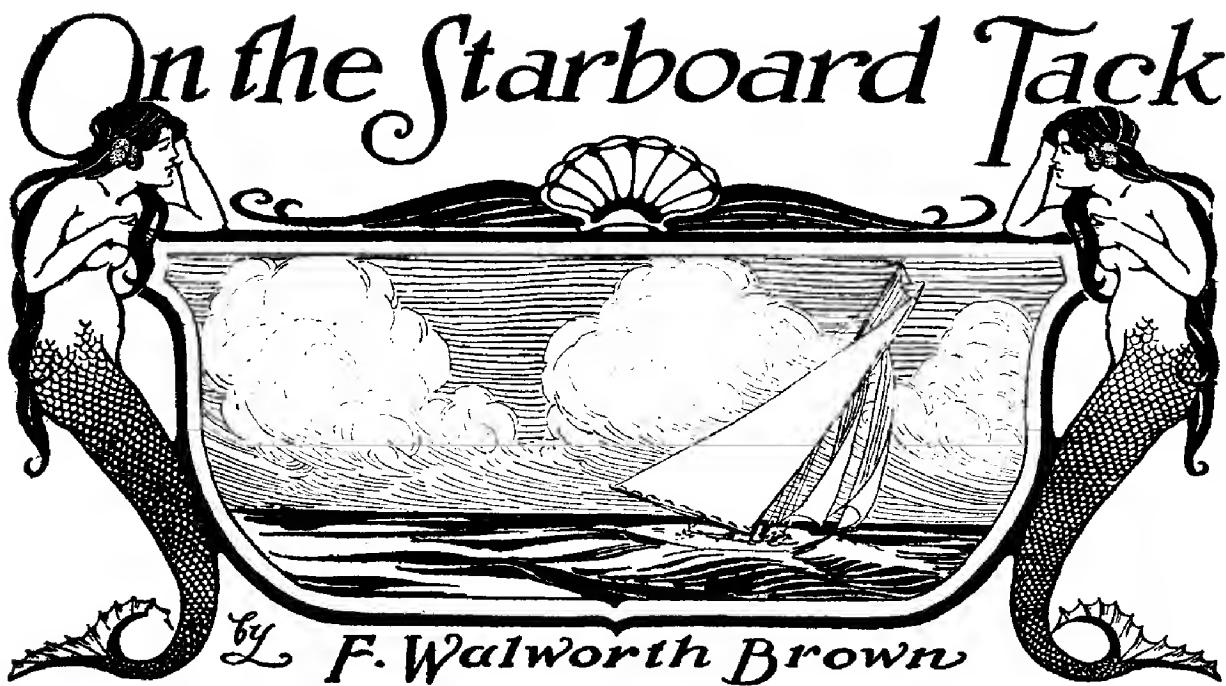
"Well, you see," drawled the humorist, "it was rather lucky for him—but he happened to fall inside!"

The Need of Experience

A FARMER'S horse nearly went crazy the first time it saw an automobile passing by the farm. The farmer, with the help of a stranger, managed at last to pacify the animal.

"You silly beast!" exclaimed the stranger, giving the horse a light smack with the reins.

"Oh, the horse has sense enough!" said the farmer. "What he wants is experience. How would you feel if you saw your trousers walking off down the road without anything in 'em?"



WELL BRED, well educated, well built, and well provided with the things of this world, Tommy Langham had all the necessary attributes of the prince in the fairy tale, combined with an inherited hard common sense which rendered him practical beyond the possibilities of either princes or fairies.

Tommy's father had left him an income which precluded all necessity of work, and Tommy's common sense preserved him from the folly of striving for more when what he had was enough. Possessed of a genial philosophy, he took life easily, content to follow the lines of least resistance. Such things as he wanted and his money would buy he had immediately, and, being far too practical to yearn for full moons, he never had seriously wanted anything his money would not buy until his lines became entangled with those of Miss Daisy Arnold.

Tommy did not lack in a sense of his own intrinsic value, though here again his common sense preserved him from undue mental elevation; and when Miss Arnold refused him the first time he retired with a feeling bordering upon

astonishment. This was hardly the proper attitude for a man in his position, and goes to show that Daisy was right in her answer.

For the better part of a month Tommy struggled to recognize Miss Arnold as a full moon which he did not want. Then he pocketed his pride and asked her again, and was again refused. He went away with less astonishment and a growing feeling that, after all, there must be something wrong with him; which was at least wholesome.

The process was repeated at short intervals during the following two months, until Tommy was reduced to amazement at his own splendid audacity in thinking that she might even for a moment consider him a matrimonial possibility.

He had just screwed his courage up to the point for the fifth or sixth trial, and anxiously awaited her answer. She was hesitating more than he had grown accustomed to expect, and his hopes rose, only to be dashed dismally to earth.

"Oh, Tommy," she said finally, "it's got to be the same answer. I like you so much, I wish you wouldn't!"

"I'm sorry," said Tommy meekly. "I don't seem able to help it."

"The trouble is, I like men who do things," she cried. "Don't you see what I mean, Tommy? You're so good-natured and—and easy-going. Sometimes I wonder if you'd even stand up for your rights."

"I am an easy mark, I suppose," admitted Tommy. "I hate to row, you know."

"That isn't exactly what I mean. It isn't necessary to raise a row, as you call it. But a girl does like to see a man show some *spunk*. Now, don't be offended, Tommy, because I like you a lot, or I wouldn't be saying this to you."

"Thank you," said Tommy meekly.

"Now let's change the subject," said Daisy. "You'll be in the race to-morrow, won't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Tommy.

"Mr. Ackers seems very sure he will win."

"He's got a good boat," said Tommy generously.

"He says that in windward work she'll beat anything in the bay."

"Maybe she will," said Tommy, whose mind was searching other roads. The girl talked on more or less at random, filling in time, while Tommy answered in monosyllables questions which he only half heard.

"Daisy," he suddenly broke out, "if I could find some way of proving to you that I'm not as—slipshod as you think, would it—"

"It might make a difference," admitted the girl doubtfully. Tommy's face fell. "I was just wondering," she added hastily, "whether I could like you any better than I do, you know, if—you were any different;" and Tommy went away sorely puzzled to know just what she meant by that.

He walked slowly down to the clubhouse, hunted up Dicky Carman, and unburdened his soul to his chum.

"H'm," said Dicky. "You know

what's the trouble, don't you? Sidney Ackers is hanging round her day and night."

"That cad!" said Tommy.

"Just so, my son. That cad. He's a fellow that does things. It's up to you to beat him at his own game."

"I can't very well punch his head," said Tommy unconsciously, thinking still along the lines of least resistance.

"Hardly," said Dicky; "though he needs it. Do you know what I heard him say yesterday? Said he'd rather foul another boat any day than lose a race fair. That's sportsmanlike, isn't it?"

"Well, that doesn't help *me* any," said Tommy disconsolately.

II.

THERE were five boats entered in the race for the commodore's cup the following day: Tommy's *Comet*, Ackers' *Alpha*, the *Norma*, the *Helfyr*, and a boat from down the bay called the *Spanking Sallie*. Nothing was known about this last entry, but of the other four, the *Comet* and the *Alpha* had proven themselves the better boats during the season, with the latter leading by two races won.

In the *Comet*, Tommy held the tiller, Dicky tended sheet, and there were six young fellows besides to sling the fifty-pound sand bags up to the weather gunwale when the boat went about, and to hang over the rail as live ballast and hold her down, if need arose.

Daisy Arnold came down the pier as they were preparing to put off. Tommy stopped operations and went forward.

"Going to have plenty of wind," she said.

"That's all we hope," answered Tommy.

"Mr. Ackers still thinks he's going to win."

"Well, we'll try and give him a race," said Tommy noncommittally.

The committee boat chugged away from the pier to take up its station at the starting line, and Tommy cast off the *Comet* and shoved her head around till the sail filled.

"Good-by," he called.

"Good-by," said the girl. "And good luck, Tommy." And Tommy went aft and took the tiller from Dicky, wondering whether Ackers had enjoyed a similar send-off.

The course was a reach to the outer mark, with the wind on the port quarter, and a beat back to the finish. The wind blew steadily from the northeast, and the bay was a dark-green field broken by lines of whitecaps, over which the big thirty-footers, with their towering sticks and spotless canvas, shot back and forth, jockeying for the start.

When the preliminary gun came, Tommy had the *Comet* well up to windward of the bunch, and perhaps three hundred yards from the line. One of the crew, with a watch, had been told off to count the time between signals, and Tommy put the boat's head to the wind, and held her shaking, drifting slowly down upon the line.

"Give us the seconds on the last minute," he said to the timekeeper, "and let the sheet run, Dicky, when I give the word."

III.

THERE were five long minutes between the first two signals, and they waited nervously, while the *Comet* drifted nearer and nearer.

"One minute more," said the timekeeper, and began counting out the seconds. "Five, ten, fifteen—"

Tommy's eyes were on the little brass cannon on the deck of the committee boat, and he began to wonder whether he had miscalculated. They were drifting rapidly down upon the line.

"Thirty-five, forty, forty-five—" said the timer.

"Let her go!" snapped Tommy, and swung the boat around. Dicky paid off the sheet as the boom swung out, the great sail filled, and, gathering momentum, the boat shot for the line, fair before the wind.

"Fifty-six, fifty-seven, fifty-eight," came the timer's voice. They were almost on the line. Tommy had shaved their margin close. Would they beat the gun and have to come about and cross again? It was an anxious moment.

"Trim her in," said Tommy, as he straightened the boat out on the course, a point or two off the wind.

"Bang!" came the starting gun, and, going like a race horse, the *Comet* shot past the committee boat, with scarce an instant to spare, first of the five to cross.

"And that's all right," said Dicky enthusiastically.

Behind them came the *Sallie*, the *Alpha*, and the *Norma* close together, with the *Helfyr* trailing. The crews sat in the bottoms of the boats and took things easy. The run to the outer mark was practically before the wind, and there was nothing for them to do. The wind seemed to be increasing, and the *Comet* easily held the lead from all but the *Spanking Sallie*, the dark horse. Halfway to the mark she had drawn abreast, and from there on slowly forged ahead.

"Looks as if she was too fast for us," said Tommy.

"We may do her up going back," answered Dicky. "We've got the others where we want 'em, anyhow."

The *Norma* meantime had fallen back till she and the *Helfyr* brought up the rear, and already were out of the race, barring accidents to the leaders. The *Alpha* held her place on the *Comet's* quarter, and, knowing her ability for windward work, Tommy was not at all sanguine that their lead was sufficient.

They neared the mark in this order.

The *Sallie*, leading, turned the mark short, and, with a curl of white water under her forefoot, went off on the starboard tack with everything humming. It looked as if she would have things her own way, when, without warning, her starboard stay parted under the tremendous strain, and to save her mast her skipper cut the halyards, and her chances ended. The great racing sail collapsed like a torn balloon, and the leader lay wallowing in the trough, waiting for a launch to tow her in.

That was sheer hard luck, but it is, indeed, an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the accident which removed the dark horse from the race left the *Comet* in the lead once more, to fight it out with the *Alpha*. They were nearing the mark, and had no time to speculate on the accident. From now on, it would be hard work for everybody aboard.

"Ready now with those bags," called Tommy, and the crew scrambled to their feet.

"Now then, hard alee," came the order a moment later, as he jammed the tiller over. The *Comet* spun on her heel, the boom came inboard and hung wavering for an instant, while the huge sail flapped and Dicky trimmed in the slack sheet like a wild man. Then she caught the wind once more, the sail filled, and as she heeled to the pressure the crew piled the sand bags out to windward, and away she went on the port tack, tearing through the white-caps and hurling spray over deck and cockpit till every one was drenched.

"Pile out now, boys, and hold her down," cried Tommy, and the crew added their live weight to the bags, hanging precariously over the rail in the effort to "hold her down."

The *Alpha* crossed their wake a moment later, speeding for the mark. Around she came, and, instead of following the *Comet's* lead, stood away on the starboard tack.

"Splitting tacks!" said Dicky. "Do you know what he's up to? He'd never do that, Tommy, if he wasn't cocksure he can cross ahead of us when we come together."

"Yes, and we've got to sail this boat for all there is in her or he will cross us," said Tommy. "The *Alpha*'s a devil at windward work."

IV.

SAILING opposite tacks, the boats gradually drew apart, and which was footing the faster or which pointing the higher it was impossible to judge. The steady, strong wind favored the *Comet*, for she was notoriously a heavy-weather boat. Tommy made a long tack, watching the throat of his sail, hugging the wind, stealing every inch he could, for the boat that points the closest to the wind may beat one that outsails her in mere speed.

"She's doing nobly," said Dicky. "Don't see how the *Alpha* can beat this much."

"Well, we'll soon find out," said Tommy. "Hard alee."

Around they came, the crew scrambling over the trunk, swinging the bags from port to starboard, and themselves climbing out on top. A moment later the *Alpha* came about also, and the boats began to draw together, and as they approached it became evident that the *Comet* was still in the lead. As near as they could tell, in fact, the *Alpha* had not succeeded in picking up an inch, and the *Comet* slipped across her bows with a good hundred yards to spare, and went on her way rejoicing.

Dicky's elation was beautiful to see, and the whole crew openly gloried in Acker's discomfiture. But the end was not yet. Each boat held her course, and again they drew apart, the *Comet* on the starboard tack, the *Alpha* on the port.

Perhaps Tommy grew a little less

vigilant, perhaps Ackers worked a little harder. At any rate, when next they came about and drew together, the *Alpha* had cut into the *Comet's* lead most woefully. The latter now had the port tack, and for a time it looked as if she would be forced to go about. But a fierce little puff of wind saved her, for, while it beat the *Alpha* down till Ackers had to swing her up into the wind, thus checking her a bit, the stiffer, more weatherly *Comet* took it gallantly, and nosed across her opponent's bows so close that the proverbial biscuit might have passed between them.

Tommy had the sand bags shifted aft a bit, thinking the boat a little down by the head. They were within sight of the clubhouse now, and one more tack would take them over the line.

For ten minutes more the boats held their present courses, when Tommy went about and headed for the line. Ackers followed instantly, and the boats began to converge, for the point where their courses crossed was not fifty yards from the finish.

It was a glorious struggle. They could see the pier and the clubhouse veranda packed with people watching. The two crews were hanging over the weather gunwales till they could see the boats' centerboards as they heeled to the fierce rush of the wind. Down they came in the heart-breaking finish, and Dicky, peering under the *Comet's* boom, measured their distance with nervous interest.

"I don't think he'll make it," he said.

"He's gained, though," said Tommy. "It'll be close."

Now the conditions were these: The *Alpha* on the port tack would be able, on her present course, to cross the line at its outer extremity, while the *Comet* likewise would be able to cross, but close inshore. The *Comet* had the right of way, being on the starboard tack, and Ackers' only hope of winning was to cross her bows. If he suc-

ceeded in doing this, he would have her under his lee, blanketed, and the race was his. On the other hand, if he ran too close, and then discovered that he could not cross ahead of her, he would be compelled to go about to avoid collision, and would be himself under the *Comet's* lee.

In any event, the burden of decision rested with Ackers, for Tommy, having the right of way, had but to sail a straight course. Again Dicky took a look.

"Yes, he's gained," he said. "But he can't pass us. He'll have to go about."

V.

THE boats were right upon one another, and suddenly Ackers' plan was clear. He would throw the burden of deciding upon Tommy, after all. He lacked room to pass, and he knew it. One hope of winning he still had. It was a slim chance, but he took it. By holding his present course he could force Tommy to give way to avoid smashing up the *Comet* in a collision. Tommy, of course, would protest, but the protest might be overruled, and, even if it wasn't, Ackers at least would have the honor of crossing the line first before the crowd on the pier. So he calmly held his course straight for the line, and Tommy was face to face with a problem demanding instant solution.

He glanced beneath the boom at the opposing boat, shot another look at the finish mark, and, leaning out, hailed the *Alpha*. "Better go about," he cried.

"No, thanks," answered Ackers; "I think there's room to pass."

"That's a bluff!" growled Dicky.

Tommy settled back and gripped the tiller. If that cad thought he could force him off his course when he had the right of way, he'd show him. He hated a row, but there were some things a fellow really couldn't stand, you know. So he fixed his eyes on the ap-

proaching line, and, scowling, nosed the *Comet* up into the very eye of the wind, which had the effect of reducing still further Ackers' narrow margin.

Then the boats were upon one another, and Ackers saw his bluff about to be called. "I say," he shouted, "don't run us down."

"My right of way," answered Tommy coolly, and did not move his tiller the fraction of an inch.

It was probably too late had he tried. An instant after, the *Comet's* forestay caught the *Alpha's* boom, shoved it inboard, and her bow crashed into her opponent's quarter with the sound of rending wood.

Then the *Comet's* forward overhang slid up on the *Alpha's* deck, smashed through the coaming of the cockpit, and, as she lurched with the weight, slipped back, and, boring straight ahead, she shaved past her victim's stern, pushing the boom out as she went, and drove on toward the finish.

It was all over in a moment, and almost before the people on the pier could grasp what had happened the *Comet*, with a badly strained forestay and a splintered nose, had slipped over the line, and the gun from the committee boat announced that the race was won.

Tommy let his halyards go by the run to take the strain off the damaged stay, and a launch picked them up and towed them in just as the outraged *Alpha*, breathing anathema and slaughter, staggered over the line, a bad second.

On the pier, the commodore turned to the vice commodore. "Served him dead right, you know," he said, in a puzzled tone, "but Tommy Langham's the last man on earth I'd have thought would do it."

Miss Daisy Arnold happened to stand where she overheard, and for some reason she smiled—a little, satisfied smile—and started down the pier to greet

Tommy. She was the first person he saw as he stepped ashore, and, leaving Dicky to care for the *Comet*, he went up to the clubhouse with her.

"Tell me about it," she cried excitedly.

"Well, we had the right of way, you know—" he began.

"Oh, I know, Tommy," she broke in. "I watched it all. I was so afraid you wouldn't do it. And if you hadn't, I'd never have forgiven you. Let's go sailing to-night. I—I'm not sure but I have something to tell you, Tommy."

"Say it now," cried Tommy.

"No," she said; "there are too many people around. And it's just for you alone."

Nerve Tonic Not Required

THE doctor had written a prescription for his patient. "You had better have this made up at the druggist's," he said. "It will probably cost you a dollar."

"A dollar!" the patient exclaimed. "All right, I'll get it made up." Then, as he turned to leave the office, he added: "I say, could you lend me a dollar to pay it with?"

The doctor gasped. He recovered in a second, however, and asked for the prescription. The patient handed it back, and after the doctor had scratched out one item in it he returned it again, together with a quarter.

"You can get what is left made up for twenty-five cents," he remarked dryly. "What I scratched out was for your nerves!"

A Polite Pupil

JIMMIE, your face is dirty again this morning!" exclaimed the teacher. "What would you say if I came to school every day with a dirty face?"

"I'd be too perlite," replied Jimmie, "to say anything!"

A Tale of Art, High and Low.

That Sort of Thing

By
Carl H. Grabo.



JE'LL make it four thousand for the twelve," said the patronizing art editor. "You ought to get five; but as you are new to the business, I'll save the magazine the difference."

"Of course," assented the artist amiably. "I'll stick you later, when you're obliged to have my work."

"That's business," agreed the art editor. "Understand, these covers are business, too. None of your artistic foolishness. We want something that's conventional in a new way. Get that? Create a type—the Jenkins Girl. Every department store must have pictures of the Jenkins Girl; pictures framed in burned wood, embroidered on sofa cushions, and stamped on leather. That is art."

"Nice prospect, art," said Jenkins.

"They all kick up a bit at first," the art editor agreed soothingly; "but they don't mind after a little. It has its compensations, you know. If you are careful, you can marry rich, move in the

best circles, join the most exclusive clubs, and, in short, be a success. You will not cease to work hard, for you will always be afraid that your wife will reproach you because she supports you."

The editor enjoyed his own conversation, and he had, besides, little to do. Observing premonitory symptoms of departure, he offered Jenkins a cigar. The artist twirled it in his fingers abstractedly.

"I'm afraid I can't comply with your ideas of fashionable marriage," he said. "Besides, when I've put by enough money, I'm going to discontinue this desecration of art and take up portrait painting. I want to study in Paris for a couple of years."

"Oh, well," said the art editor compassionately, "if you're going to talk that way, why, go on and enjoy yourself. Renounce this material world and live only in the joy of creation—is that the idea? I said twenty-five hundred for the covers, didn't I?"

"Oh, I haven't reached the point where I can't see the difference between a quarter and a half dollar. Just satisfy my curiosity upon one point, and the artistic conscience will have kicked its last. Why, in doing the altogether for a magazine cover—say, a spring piece or the 'Spirit of the Woods,' or some such original fantasy—why, I say, should the unadorned figure be plump and solid, whereas, if clothed, she must be made svelte, diaphanous, and slinky? I have studied anatomy, you know, and I have always in mind the figure as well as the clothes in which it is sheathed."

"Your talk is piffle," said the art editor. "But I'm sorry you have studied anatomy. It restrains invention. If you will look over our leading illustrators, you will note that none of them have any knowledge of anatomy. Your reference to clothes is, however, important. You must realize, of course, how vital it is that you be not only up to date, but a little ahead of the styles. It is well to walk the avenue a bit, but the best way of all is to study the latest imported shows. You will find that our leading actresses have a great function in the dissemination of new styles."

"I heed your words of wisdom. Any particular one you recommend?"

"Lipski tells me that the costumes for his prima donna cost him fifteen thousand. Better strike him for a pass. Just mention me."

"And who is the prima donna?" asked the artist.

"The delightful French comedienne, Yvette Crevecoeur, no less, fresh from Iowa via Paris."

"I'm from Iowa myself," said Jenkins. "I'll drop in and see her. Iowa may thus furnish an Easter design for New York."

II.

LIPSKI, manager of "The Prancing Princess" show, pink, blasé, and with the stripes running up and down,

granted Jenkins a pass with scarcely an evidence of life.

"Great little chorus," he piped wearily through rolls of fat.

The hussar girlies of "The Prancing Princess" gamboled frivolously, clad in cobweb hosiery and the minimum of supplementary garments; the comedian gesticulated his silent encore; and Yvette Crevecoeur, the *Prancing Princess* herself, attired successively in a riding habit, a bathing suit, a street dress, an evening gown, and coronation robes, sang songs variously inconsequential.

Jenkins was bored to death and looked about for a means of escape over or under the five large ladies between him and the aisle. Thereupon the *Princess* danced down stage and sang the chorus of her song directly at him.

"Great Cedar Rapids!" said he under his breath. "It was the auburn hair that fooled me."

He called an usher to carry his card to the prima donna, who presently received him in her dressing room. She was having her hair revamped, and the maid hovered over her with deft fingers. But she extended a hand and smiled at him from beneath the curling iron.

"It's your own hair, too," he said, aggrieved, "and such a color! No wonder I didn't recognize you."

"Art demands its sacrifices," she answered lightly, but he thought that she was a bit hurt.

"Why didn't you tell me, Molie, that you were in this?" he reproached her. "I supposed you were still in Paris."

"How's the art, Will?" she evaded. "You must be prosperous if you can afford front-row seats for such a silly show."

"Oh, I got in on a pass—Lipski."

"I was afraid you were making money," she said, relieved.

"And why shouldn't I do that?"

"It would spoil your work, of course," she answered.

"You think so?" he asked, and looked at her quizzically. "And you in this show?"

"I wasn't going to let you know of this until later," she replied. "Then I saw you were about to leave, and I couldn't resist throwing myself at you. I get so lonesome sometimes and long so to see a friend. That's why I signaled you. It was no especial compliment, you see."

The maid dusted her with talcum powder. Jenkins, out of habit, let his eyes wander over the objects of the room—the trunks, the forms with the costly dresses hung upon them, the bare walls and floor, the gas jet in which the maid heated the curling iron, and finally back to the dressing table with its accessories of silver and cut glass, each a sculptor's tool for the modeling of beauty.

"Why are you doing it, Mollie? For the money?" he asked.

She shot a quick, apprehensive glance at him. But he was abstractedly noting the details of a dress.

"Oh, it's the easiest way to the legitimate," she said carelessly. "Then, too, it gives me training of a sort. And, best of all, it gives me money which will be of use. I make lots of money," she added, and, tentatively, "more than I know what to do with."

The suggestion was lost upon him. "I thought Shakespeare and Ibsen were the only boys for you," he said.

"They'll keep," she answered gayly. "A little more rouge, Marie. Now you may go."

Jenkins shook his head, frowning. "You and I were to put Cedar Rapids on the map, remember?" he said wistfully. "You the great actress, I the great portrait painter. Now look at us!"

She stole a troubled glance at him. "You will be the painter, I'm confident

of that, whether I'm the actress or just a Prancing Princess."

"You think so?" he demanded again sharply.

"One of us must make good, of course," she replied. "It's for the glory of Cedar Rapids and for each other. I'll feel I have a share in your success. And that is why I want you to let me—"

"Suppose I should go in for the commercial art myself?" he interposed, unheeding her words.

"But you won't," she said, and laid her hand upon his. "I have faith in you, Will, more than in myself."

The young man covered her hand in his, and then let it drop. "I might do it, just the same," he said. "Don't be too sure."

"I'm not afraid," she answered, smiling, but she studied him narrowly nevertheless. He was not looking at her.

"Do you remember what we gave up for this life of art?" he asked.

"Yes—no—I guess so," she answered uneasily, for she saw there was no stopping him. She nervously snapped the cover of a jewel box. Slyly she abstracted a pink slip of paper with a serrated edge. She unfolded it, read it, folded it again, and held it concealed in the palm of her hand. She snapped the cover of the box again and set it upon the dressing table. Then she awakened to him. He was soliloquizing:

"I might create a type—the Jenkins Girl: Jenkins Girl walking down Fifth Avenue, Jenkins Girl at the altar, Jenkins Girl pouring tea, Jenkins Girl with arms about the neck of Jenkins young man. These works of art would appear on magazine covers and sofa pillows. The bedroom of every sweet slip of a sixteen-year-old girl would contain one."

"No, not that," she said confidently.

"And we gave up for this," he went on, undeterred, "the art of Iowa. I

might be painting cornfields and pumpkins for exhibition at the State and county fairs. And perhaps the representative from my district would insist upon the purchase by the State of one of my masterpieces to hang in the capitol building. You would give dramatic readings at the church socials, and all the good people would shake their heads uneasily, but never fail to come and applaud."

"I should give scenes from Shakespeare," she said, smiling, "but I fear they would never stand for Ibsen."

"And we would have a pretty place with a large garden and trees and big verandas. And we should have children to bring up, perhaps. I think of them sometimes when I'm blue."

"Don't, Will," she said, and laid her hand over her eyes.

"I'm talking this way to work on your feelings." He laughed uncertainly. "Mollie," he said, "I want you now more than then. I can make a living for us both at my work. And though it may not be portrait painting, I'd rather do it with you than be Rembrandt without you. I mean it. It's not a matter of sudden impulse, but deliberate. Maybe the better work would come later. And if not, no matter."

"It's good of you," she said, and turned to him that he might see the tears in her eyes. "But we've given up too many years now to go back. We must keep on. Don't you see we could never forgive ourselves for the wasted years? Besides," she added, noting that he was unconvinced, "I can't give up this life now; it has grown upon me; I must have the notoriety and the lights and the music and all the things Cedar Rapids could never give me. It's true," she said in answer to his pained look. "And most of all I've set my heart on your success. I could never forgive myself if I should keep you

from becoming all you should and will become."

III.

FOR a brief moment there was silence, while their early dream endured the light of a new aspiration. Then, on a quick impulse, she came to him, and, kneeling beside him, put her arms about him.

"I want you to promise me something," she commanded gently. "Promise?"

"I'd do 'most anything for you, Mollie," he said.

"It is this: I wish you to take some of my money for the years in Paris. Don't draw away. Promise me you will. The money comes so easily, means so little to me! And you would do so much with it. I should feel that all your success was mine, too, and that would make me glad. You would not begrudge me that happiness, Will? You care enough for me not to mind my having a part?"

He endeavored gently to release himself. "Promise to take the money," she insisted, and, placing her hands on either cheek, she forced him to look at her. "You won't?" she asked. "You won't do that for me?"

"I couldn't do it, Mollie. I love you for it, but I couldn't. Besides, there's no necessity."

"Why can't you?" she insisted.

"I shouldn't feel right doing it," he answered. "I'll get along all right. I can earn enough to make my way. And the credit will be yours just as truly as though you sent me a weekly allowance. I'm afraid I couldn't take your money unless you let me marry you. Then, of course, it would be all right. Many of our best citizens live on their wives' money."

"I couldn't go so far as that," she said, trying to laugh at his irony.

"Will you do something for me?"

he asked. "Something better for you perhaps than to marry me?"

"Why should I," she flashed, "when you will do nothing for me?"

"It is that you give up this sort of thing." He nodded his head to indicate the surroundings as a whole. "Go into the legitimate, Mollie. Save your money for the hard times you'll find there. Remember, I've my ideal of you. And I don't like to see you in this. So give it up for my sake."

Mollie stood apart from him, and her lips trembled, though she seemed to laugh through her tears. "Would you have me do all that for your sake?" she asked in a queer voice.

"If it isn't too much to ask," he answered humbly.

She choked, and replied between a laugh and a sob: "Then I'll do it—for your sake. You see, yours will be the credit when I'm playing *Lady Macbeth* to stupendous audiences."

"And yours," he said gravely, "when I paint the portraits of our leading citizens. Do you think we'll find compensation in the doing, Mollie?"

"We mustn't ever think of that again," she said firmly. "Now go. Write to me sometimes."

When he had kissed her good-by and gone away she dropped her head amid the toilet silver and cried quietly. Lipski found her thus when he came to discover the cause for the delay of the final act.

"It's a nervous breakdown," she said, and dried her eyes calmly. "I must quit. I can't stand it any longer."

"But the dresses!" he cried in consternation.

"You can have them refitted for Miss Dutton," she answered indifferently, and tore to bits the pink slip of paper somewhat blistered with tears.

"Eighteen thousand a week, contract, salary, trouble for me, all nothing!" said Lipski and spread his hands hopelessly. "Only a fool would be in the

theatrical business and have dealing with these actresses. When can you take your part again?"

"When I recover," said she, "I shall go into the legitimate as an understudy to Mrs. Clarke in Shakespearian rôles."

"Then why did you give me all this trouble and expense, if you had such crazy notions as that? Why didn't you try to act Shakespeare before, if you think you can?"

"I thought I needed the money," she said, "and now I find I don't."

"You are crazy, girl," said Lipski, with utter conviction.

The art editor had much the same opinion to express of Jenkins.

Sea Color

THE majority of writers speak of the deep blue sea. But the sea is not always blue by any means. There are any number of colors to be observed.

The Mediterranean, however, is true blue, because very few large, fresh-water rivers enter it, and, being practically landlocked, and exposed to powerful sunlight, it has the greatest evaporation of all seas.

Some time ago the sea off the Californian coast turned almost black, and fishing came to an end, but no cause could be assigned for the phenomenon. The dull-reddish tint of the Red Sea, which has given it its name, is due to millions upon millions of microscopic algae, or seaweeds and submarine plants. The Yellow Sea of China owes its color to the floods of muddy water which the rivers pour into it.

Generally speaking, the blueness of the sea water is in constant ratio to its saltiness. In the tropics the tremendous evaporation induced by the blazing sun causes the water to be much saltier than it is in the more northern latitudes. For about thirty degrees both north and south of the equator, the waters are of an exquisite azure.

Baffling Mystery of an old Masterpiece-

The Bashful Crocodile

By Roland Ashford Phillips ~



CHAPTER I.

A MOMENT'S DARKNESS.

THROUGH the windowless, shadow-hung gallery, Mr. Rodney Kendrick, connoisseur and collector, moved quietly and with assurance, as one perfectly familiar with his surroundings. He hummed softly to himself. The faint, barely perceptible glow of the early twilight filtered down from the big skylight overhead, to no advantage save to mark the confines of the leaded panes.

Halfway across the gallery floor he paused, turned, and retraced his steps. Beside the door, on the tapestried wall, his fingers found the push buttons that controlled the lights in the high, trough-like borders. He snapped them in rapid succession. Then his humming ceased.

"Confound those lights!" he broke out. "What's happened to them now? This is the second time to-day they've misbehaved. If they fail to-night—" He stopped. The mere thought of that possibility was too disturbing to contemplate.

He opened the door leading out into the wide corridor, prepared to demand an explanation from the butler, but unfortunately, since Dudley was not in sight, and several other people were, Mr. Kendrick wisely restrained himself and closed the door again. He would reserve his remarks for some later time. Nevertheless, Dudley must answer for the inexcusable annoyance. It must not happen again. What good were lights, anyway, he reasoned irritably, if they refused to operate when they were needed?

Still grumbling, he walked across the floor, the heavy rugs smothering his footsteps, avoided the divan and the chairs that had been arranged in a wide semicircle facing one end of the gallery, and paused before a velvet curtain that served to screen a portion of the wall.

Standing there, his mood changed. The affair of the lights was forgotten. The scowl that clouded his features magically disappeared. He broke into a low chuckle. Then, as cautiously and expectantly as a child might steal a glimpse of a thing denied it, Mr. Ken-

drick reached out, touched the folds of the velvet curtains, and parted them.

The massive gold frame was barely discernible; the painting it held was blurred in the gloom. But Mr. Kendrick, peering eagerly, knew what the frame inclosed, and the very knowledge of it sent his pulses racing. "To-night," he murmured rapturously, "the others shall see it!"

For a long time he remained there, a stooped and shadow-muffled figure in the silent gallery. Then he allowed the curtain to slip from his fingers, and reluctantly turned away. Suddenly, as he reached the door, the tardy lights came on, and the walls of the gallery sprang into view as swiftly and miraculously as a colored picture flashed upon a screen.

Mr. Kendrick blinked, started back, and whirled expectantly, as if to find an intruder at his elbow. Then, finding no one, the situation explained itself. The current had failed to act at his first bidding, but the connection had been made and left, and now, with the coming of the belated power, the lights blazed out. "Confound it!" he exclaimed for the second time, recovering from his bewilderment. "What does this fool tampering mean? It must stop at once! Dudley must explain."

His restless eyes swept the lofty gallery even as he spoke, lingering with pardonable pride upon this canvas and that, upon the hanging tapestries, the marble and bronze figures, and upon the squat medieval lamp that burned dully on its stone pedestal. The warm red of the heavy rugs, the soft gray of the walls, the cunningly hidden border strips that trapped and diffused the lights, were all a part of the comforting picture. Mr. Kendrick's eyes came to rest at last upon the guardian velvet curtain at the far end of the room.

The stage was set—his stage. The spectators were soon to gather—the

spectators he had chosen so carefully. And when the curtains should open—Mr. Kendrick heaved a deep sigh of pleasurable anticipation. One by one he pressed the buttons, and one by one the walls were plunged into gloom. He opened the door and closed it softly behind him, making sure that it was locked before he walked away.

As Mr. Kendrick moved down the corridor in the direction of the living room, the butler crossed his path. Instantly the master of the house recalled a most important matter.

"Dudley!" he called. "Has any one been tampering with the electric switches this afternoon? The lights in the gallery are acting—er—freakishly."

"The lights, sir?" repeated Dudley. "I did not know they were out of order."

"You must look into the matter, Dudley. Have them inspected at once."

"I shall telephone the power company immediately," said the butler.

"I don't want anything to interfere with to-night's program, Dudley. You are my stage manager. It is most important that things shall run smoothly. You understand, of course. Most important." He hesitated a moment, while a significant glance passed between master and servant. "Have all the guests arrived?"

Dudley nodded. "Yes, sir. The last ones came an hour ago. Mr. and Mrs. Rankin, Mr. McGrath—"

"And Mr. Talbot?" the collector inquired anxiously.

"Mr. Talbot arrived while you were on the links."

Mr. Kendrick made evident his relief. "Very well, Dudley. See that dinner is served promptly to-night—there must be no delay. You understand? I expect a great deal from you to-night, Dudley. You must not fail me. And Dudley," he went on in a lower tone, "see that Mr. Talbot is made very comfortable. He is a most desirable

guest—represents a clique of wealthy English collectors. I am highly complimented that he saw fit to accept my invitation. I shall be most interested in meeting him."

"Just a minute, Mr. Kendrick," Dudley spoke up, as his employer started away, "did you see Mr. Ward this afternoon? He was asking to speak with you."

"Oh, in regard to the canvas he brought, I suppose?"

"I believe so, sir."

"You may tell him that I shall examine the painting later on. If he cares to, he may leave the canvas in my room."

"Yes, sir."

"And, Dudley," Mr. Kendrick continued, "you have obeyed my instructions? None of the guests has entered the gallery to-day?"

"I have taken good care of that," Dudley responded.

"Very good! Very good! I don't wish my little surprise to be anticipated. We must be very careful—in more ways than one, Dudley."

"You may depend upon me, Mr. Kendrick."

CHAPTER II.

THE HONORED GUEST.

WITH hands clasped behind him, the master of the house walked down the corridor and ascended the broad flight of stairs that led to the upper hall. Reaching there, he went directly to one of the doors and tapped lightly upon it. A girlish voice bade him enter.

"Don't let me interfere, Paula," he said as he stepped into his daughter's cozy sitting room. "I just wanted you to know that all the guests have arrived, so Dudley tells me. I had to leave them a moment to look after the lights. I missed welcoming Mr. Talbot, but I will convey my apologies to him later in the evening. There have been so many details to arrange. Din-

ner is to be rather early, and I want you to be down at least fifteen minutes before it is served."

"I won't be late if I can help it," the girl replied. "But Miss Halsey and Mr. Ward have been with me all afternoon. I've elected myself a guide. I'm making personally conducted tours for the edification of our guests. We visited everywhere except the gallery—and Dudley wouldn't let us in."

"We're all to visit the gallery after dinner," Mr. Kendrick said. "I didn't want to spoil my surprise. I hope you haven't given so much as a hint to—"

"Of course not. But at the time I had forgotten all about it. Do you know, father," the girl went on, "I never saw a man so appreciative as Mr. Ward. I'm quite sure he has exhausted his stock of superlatives. Why, he went into ecstasy over those Ch'in Lung vases."

"Did he? Well, they're worth it. He won't find another pair like them in this country."

"I told Mr. Ward you had half promised them to me, but that I was afraid they would go as—as the other things have gone. You know how unreasonable you are, father. Just when I begin to admire a vase or a bit of tapestry or a painting—it suddenly disappears. And you'll never explain why. There was that lovely little prayer rug—"

"You didn't mention that to Mr. Ward, did you, Paula?" the father took up sharply.

"Why not? He was very much interested. I described it as well as I could. Mr. Ward said it must have been worth five thousand dollars. Of course it wasn't, but I didn't try to dispute him. You told me it wasn't worth more than five hundred."

Mr. Kendrick's face underwent a sudden and decided change, but the girl did not witness it. "I wish you wouldn't take every one into your confidence,

Paula," he remonstrated. "I've told you that so many times before. Why will you persist in doing exactly what I asked you not to do?"

"Oh, but surely—Mr. Ward—you don't mind my telling him?"

"I didn't want it to become known that the rug was here—or had been here," he maintained. "Of course you didn't understand, but you'll be more thoughtful in the future, won't you?"

The girl put her arms about her father's neck. "Oh, I'm sorry—really sorry," she faltered. "I didn't think I was doing anything so dreadfully wrong."

"It wasn't wrong, Paula, and it wasn't dreadful," Mr. Kendrick said hurriedly, at the sight of his daughter's crest-fallen face. "I—I'm just a little jealous of my prizes, that's all," he added by the way of explanation.

"Sometimes I believe you are fonder of them than you are of me," the girl declared, smiling again. "And sometimes I think just the opposite. You're forever buying and forever selling. I can't quite make you out, father."

"It's just a matter of business, Paula," he answered. "We must live, you know. And if I didn't make money where would all your pretty clothes come from?"

"All my pretty clothes haven't amounted to much in the past," Paula said quickly. "This is the first house party you have allowed me to give—and it is your party, after all, instead of mine. You invited most of the guests. You never wanted any of my friends here—what few I have. You seemed to fear them. You seemed to think they were coming here only to pilfer. You were ready and eager that I should go out and enjoy myself—away from home; but you protested when I wished to return my obligations. To-night is the first time we have entertained in our home. Why? I have tried to answer that question. Others

have tried, too. Why won't you answer it, father?"

Behind a smiling and placid countenance, Mr. Kendrick winced. The arraignment hurt because he had no defense to offer. Still, he did not permit his feelings to betray themselves. He had fought them down for so long that it was not hard to retain the mask that concealed them.

"I'm downright jealous all the way through," he declared. "That explains it, Paula. I'm jealous and selfish. You mustn't blame me. You're my greatest treasure, dear. I often wonder how long you are to be with me," he went on tenderly. "I'm living in fear of that moment. One of these days somebody will come along and—and rob me. Then I'll be miserable."

"You're not miserable when your other treasures go," the girl contended. "You pretend to be, but I feel sometimes, deep down in my heart, that you're shamming."

Mr. Kendrick made a determined effort to change the subject of discussion. "Let us forget what has passed, dear," he said. "To-night begins a new life for us both. We're not going to be hermits any longer. We're going to rub shoulders with the world and find happiness on every side. Run along now and finish dressing. I'll expect you to be downstairs promptly."

"Why, I never heard you talk that way before, father," Paula cried, her eyes radiant. "Do you really mean—all that?"

"Every word of it, dear," he responded, "and more. We're going to live differently from now on."

With an eager, impulsive kiss and a laugh the girl took leave of her father at the door. When he had closed it softly behind him he walked thoughtfully down the hall toward his own apartment.

Later, finished with her toilet, Paula slipped from her room and hurried

down the stairs, totally unconscious of the fact that she was observed. She presented so simple and charming a picture as she paused an instant on the lower landing to smooth out a ruffle on her sleeve that one of the guests, who beheld the vision from a comfortable chair in the smoking room—the door of which was partly open—stifled an exclamation, laid aside his cigar, and advanced to meet her.

"Good evening, Miss Kendrick," he said, extending his hand. He had only spoken a word to her at the time of his arrival—a cold and formal self-introduction, but she had been in his thoughts ever since.

Paula, a trifle confused, looked into the man's frank, level eyes, and smiled. She tried desperately to recall his name, but for the moment it eluded her. She remembered the introduction, but could not connect the name with it. Besides, the change from tweeds to evening dress had made a remarkable change in his appearance. She found herself facing a tall, comely young man, apparently in his early thirties, whose regular, clean-cut features and manners showed breeding and refinement. Paula was a girl whose likes and dislikes were born of first impressions. So even as the man advanced toward her, and spoke and held out his hand, she was interested. She decided at the instant his fingers touched her own that she was going to like him.

"I seem to be the first to come downstairs," he observed.

As they talked, Paula found her companion more and more agreeable. There was a spirit of good-fellowship in his words. She was certain that they would get along splendidly together. If she could only recall his name! A little panic of fear gripped her as she conjured up the dread possibility of a third person's appearing upon the scene. An introduction was out of the question.

In hopes that by some chance remark

the guest would betray himself, or that his name would come to her as swiftly as it had deserted her, Paula continued the conversation. "Have you been talking with father this afternoon?" she inquired, launching herself bravely into the first subject that crossed her mind. "Has he entertained you with his discourses upon the—the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism on modern art, or some other horribly dry topic?"

"I haven't had that pleasure yet," he responded; "but I am sure Mr. Kendrick's discussions would not prove irksome. I am looking forward to a very pleasant chat."

"I cannot imagine how you have escaped. Father tries desperately hard to interest me in his arguments, but I'm afraid I am a very dull and unappreciative companion."

"Impossible," the other replied. "The fact is, Miss Kendrick," he went on to explain, "I have not yet had the honor of meeting your father."

"Not met him?" Paula exclaimed. "Then how——"

"Oh, pardon me! I was under the impression that Mr. Kendrick explained the situation." He smiled into the girl's perturbed face. "You see, I received your father's letter upon my arrival Friday at the New York hotel. My prospective appearance in this country was heralded by the newspapers, and, knowing of my kindred interests, he thoughtfully asked me to make up one of his house party. Your father, I may add, Miss Kendrick, is known as one of the most distinguished connoisseurs and collectors in this part of the world. I consider it an honor indeed to be numbered among the few who are privileged to meet him personally and to admire his art treasures."

In a flash the speaker's name flashed into the girl's mind. Her father had mentioned it several times before and appeared to be delighted that the critic had accepted his invitation. "It is very

good of you to say that, Mr. Talbot," Paula answered, and now that the dreaded gulf had been spanned she breathed easier. "For the moment I was puzzled. Father has spoken of you so often. He was afraid at first that you might be too busy to visit us."

"Too busy?" Talbot said reproachfully. "I would have broken every other engagement to come here." His voice was low and serious. "You do not realize what it means to me, Miss Kendrick."

"I hope your expectations will be fulfilled," she replied.

"I know they will." Talbot was smiling again. "It has hardly been fair," he went on, "for Mr. Kendrick to keep so wonderful a treasure house, and so charming a hostess, all to himself."

Paula's cheeks colored. "Father is jealous," she said, falling back upon the only defense she knew. "I suppose that explains it. Aren't all men of his profession the same, Mr. Talbot?"

"Not all of them," Talbot returned, with a quick and curious tightening of his lips. "If they were, Miss Kendrick, the most beautiful things in the world would be locked away."

"I've often given father the same argument," she said.

"You have?" Talbot seemed to be interested. "And what did he say? How did he defend himself?"

"He pleaded guilty to selfishness and jealousy."

"But he isn't selfish and jealous in any other way, is he? Your father always gives you what you want?"

"Oh, always," Paula hastened to assure him. "He gives me everything. In matters concerning my material well-being he is a spendthrift."

CHAPTER III.

THE GENUINE LANDSCAPE.

TALBOT eyed the girl frankly, and was silent. Paula, feeling herself the object of so open and critical a

scrutiny, looked away, and when, a moment later, Ward appeared upon the lower landing and came forward at her beckoning, she welcomed the interruption. "Oh, Mr. Ward," she broke out, "I want you to meet Mr. Talbot. Of course you know who he is."

Ward, a younger man than Talbot, with steady gray eyes and a boyish face, came forward to meet the critic. "I'm glad to make your acquaintance," he said as their hands met. "I have always said that there were two men in the art world whom I would be interested in meeting. One of them is Mr. Kendrick, the other is yourself."

Talbot seemed to be genuinely embarrassed. "To have my name stand with Mr. Kendrick's is an honor indeed. I'm afraid you have exaggerated my very ordinary abilities."

"Exaggerated? Not at all," Ward took up swiftly. "As a critic you are known from Rotten Row to Bombay, and as a keen follower of blind trails—well, I've heard the story of the lost Titian, Mr. Talbot. For a long time we did not know who was responsible for the restoration of the stolen painting to the British Museum. Then, quite by accident, the truth came out." He turned toward the girl as if to offer an explanation. "Of course you have heard of it; Miss Kendrick. Mr. Talbot trailed the thief over half of Europe and nabbed him, with the stolen masterpiece in his possession, in Ceylon. It was a remarkable and skillful bit of work; an adventure surpassing any of Sherlock Holmes'. My congratulations may be tardy, but I extend them just the same. You should not hide your light under a bushel, Mr. Talbot."

"I only did what was expected of me," Talbot replied modestly. "The authorities placed the matter in my hands and asked me to do the best I knew how. I did. But I assure you there was nothing thrilling or remarkable in the pursuit. The thief left a

trail behind him that any amateur could follow, and it was merely a case of keeping on the go until one or the other of us gave up. Fortunately for me, he ran out of money and out of breath."

"To hear you tell it," returned Ward, "one would think you had been out for a holiday jaunt."

"So it was," said Talbot. "Recreation and business combined. I not only collared the thief, but stumbled across several interesting canvases as well. Fool's luck," he added, laughing.

"I'll leave you gentlemen to continue your talk," put in Paula, "while I look after my other guests."

"Don't be too long," Ward cautioned.

"We may need you as a peacemaker," chimed in Talbot, smiling.

The men looked after the girl as she disappeared at the end of the corridor; then turned reluctantly into the smoking room. They settled themselves comfortably in the deep leather chairs before the open fireplace. "A charming girl," announced Talbot, after a long period of reflective silence.

"Very," returned Ward.

"I wonder what lucky man will—" Talbot broke off abruptly and stared into the fire.

Ward turned in his chair and regarded the speaker fixedly; then he frowned as a quick, unwelcome suspicion entered his mind. Talbot appeared to be oblivious to his surroundings and to the searching gaze the other focused upon him. And as he sat there, staring blankly into the flames, his fingers drumming softly upon the arm of his chair, a slow smile touched his lips—a smile that Ward tried in vain to interpret.

"The bargaining for canvases seems to be a mighty futile pursuit, after all," Talbot began once more, "when one compares it to other objects in life."

"Yes," agreed Ward, still watching him.

Once more the two men were silent.

The fire crackled and snapped and sent up tiny showers of sparks. Dudley noiselessly appeared at the door, and, being unobserved and apparently unwanted, as noiselessly disappeared.

"What do you think of Mr. Kendrick's gallery?" Ward broke in at last.

"I haven't had the pleasure of visiting it yet," Talbot replied. "I am looking forward to that privilege."

"You do not think that a man of Mr. Kendrick's experience and knowledge could be tricked?" Ward asked.

"In what way?" Talbot inquired, surprised at the question.

"That he might purchase a copy instead of the original and not detect the fraud?"

Talbot shook his head. "Not Mr. Kendrick," he declared, with assurance. "Why do you ask?"

With a nod Ward indicated a painting that hung above the mantel—a mellowed composition of sun-dappled woodland, a wide sweep of amethyst sky, and a mirrorlike pool that reflected both. "Mr. Kendrick and I have had many discussions over that canvas," he said.

"Discussions? In what way?"

"It was bought for an original Bellini," Ward answered.

Talbot arose deliberately from his chair and inspected the canvas at close range. Ward watched him expectantly. "So you think that Mr. Kendrick has been deceived?" Talbot asked, completing his inspection.

"Some of the cleverest men in the country are fooled occasionally," Ward remarked.

"I grant you that," said Talbot. "They are fooled because they are pitted against the shrewdest crooks of the age. The manufacture of masterpieces has reached unbelievable perfection. In some instances I do not hesitate to say the copies are superior in many respects to the originals. The

artists themselves have been known to be deceived."

"Then why do you believe Mr. Kendrick to be an exception?"

Talbot dropped into his chair again. "Well, in the first place," he observed, "Bellini's work is not valuable enough to tempt the copyists. These geniuses play for high stakes. They cannot afford to waste time and energy in the manufacture of a canvas that will bring but a few hundreds."

"Then you are convinced that the canvas you inspected is a genuine Bellini?" Ward asked.

"There is absolutely no question about it," replied Talbot, nodding. "The work is an original of Bellini's."

Ward settled back in his chair, while a flicker of perplexity crossed his countenance. "My opinion seems to be riddled," he said at last. "I was positive that it was a copy, but with you and Mr. Kendrick arrayed against me—" He broke off with an embarrassed laugh. "I guess I'm not the expert I considered myself to be."

"You don't need to apologize," Talbot answered. "By forming an opinion, and sticking to it, you have made it quite clear that you have character. That's something to be commended."

Ward smiled at the compliment the critic had paid him, but did not immediately respond, and presently the talk drifted upon other subjects. Through all the conversation that followed, however, Ward appeared to be strangely preoccupied, and made his attitude so obvious that more than once Talbot looked at him in polite astonishment.

Later, when the smoking room had filled, and Talbot had strolled off with Mr. Kendrick, Ward slipped away in search of Paula. He came upon her in one of the reception rooms, surrounded by an interested group. After a bit of maneuvering he managed to draw her to one side. At the sight of his unusually perturbed face the girl broke into

an exclamation. "What has happened?" she cried. "Was Mr. Talbot's company so dreadfully stupid?"

"Just the contrary," Ward said. "It was intensely interesting. You had never met Mr. Talbot before, had you?"

"No. I met him for the first time this afternoon."

"And your father?"

"He met him for the first time this evening," said the girl.

"Then Talbot was invited here by letter?" asked the young man.

"Father learned of his arrival in New York and sent an invitation to his hotel," the girl explained. "Why?"

"Because," Ward responded quietly, but with a note of triumph in his voice, "the man you introduced me to isn't Talbot, the critic. I'm sure of that!"

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN THE CURTAINS PARTED.

PAULA stared at the speaker in amazement. "Not the critic?" she repeated. Why—why do you say that?"

"Remember when you introduced him to me?" Ward began. "Well," he continued as the girl nodded, "when I mentioned the affair of the stolen Titian, I made a slip. The picture was not recovered in Ceylon, but in Cairo. I did not realize my mistake until afterward—and Talbot did not correct me. That's what started me thinking. Later I proved that my early suspicions were correct."

"I don't understand," Paula said.

"You know the painting over the mantel in the smoking room?"

"You mean the Corot?" Paula said.

Ward nodded. "Yes, the Corot. The guest you introduced me to, who is credited with being the greatest expert in Europe, unhesitatingly pronounced it a genuine Bellini!"

"I—I can't believe it!" broke from the astounded girl.

"What object could I have in telling you a falsehood?" Ward said reproachfully.

"Oh, I didn't mean that," Paula explained hurriedly. "I meant—that Mr. Talbot must have been joking."

Ward shook his head. "Far from it. He was serious."

The girl appeared to be more bewildered than ever. "But if he is not the Mr. Talbot we expected, who is he? Why is he here? Why should he misrepresent himself?"

"I cannot answer any of those questions, Miss Kendrick," Ward replied slowly, meditatively; "but I shall make every effort to find out. This house party is something of an event," he went on, "and there are any number of men who would assume a big risk in order to attend."

"Then you believe this man is here under false pretenses?"

Ward nodded. "I am positive of it."

"Hadn't we better tell father?" Paula suggested.

"I intend to later on," Ward answered. "However, I do not wish to disturb Mr. Kendrick until I have fully verified my suspicions. The discovery will come soon enough. This pretender, whoever he is, will not be able to fool your father. Suppose we wait until after dinner? I'll watch this Mr. Talbot and find out something more definite before confronting him. I think that will be the better way."

Paula clasped and unclasped her hands nervously. "You do not think, if this man is an impostor, that he could possibly mean harm—to father?"

An all but perceptible change swept across Ward's face. "What do you mean?" he questioned swiftly. "How could this man harm your father?"

"Oh, I don't know," she reasoned; "but—but to have a stranger in the house—in this house—with all of father's treasures—" Her voice broke, and she was silent.

Ward continued to gaze searchingly into the girl's doubting eyes; then he spoke with grim confidence. "Please do not worry about that, Miss Kendrick," he said. "It isn't likely that this man is a criminal, and yet—" A shadow of doubt came over his face. "But remember that, whatever he may be, I am watching."

Dudley appeared before them to announce that dinner was served. Ward smilingly offered his arm to the girl and led the way into the dining room. The big Jacobean dining hall, with its softly gleaming lights, its high-paneled walls, its brilliant hunting canvases, and its huge open fireplace in which a wood fire crackled merrily, formed an admirable setting for the guests who assembled at the table.

At the right of the host sat Talbot, who was particularly uncommunicative during the dinner, and whose eyes constantly strayed toward Miss Kendrick. Paula, for all her fears—they had not been entirely dispelled by Ward's promises—chatted gayly, and pretended to be serenely unaware of the continued observation. Occasionally she glanced in Ward's direction, and each time she saw that his eyes were fastened stealthily upon Talbot.

Next to Ward sat McGrath, a stern, sharp-featured man who was known among his associates as a shrewd expert in all matters pertaining to art, and a dependable agent, who, during an adventurous and varied career, had been instrumental in the buying and selling of uncounted old masters.

Beyond the expert sat Powell, a several-time millionaire who found, or pretended to find, more keen enjoyment in the collecting of canvases than he did in the collecting of dollars. And as he had a sufficient accumulation of the latter, he did not find it an arduous task to gratify his whim. Opposite to him sat his wife, a prim, smallish old

lady in black, who had given him the needed impetus toward both collections.

The others at the table were names to conjure with in the realm of picturedom; critics and collectors, artists and connoisseurs, dealers and agents; those who appreciated what they bargained for, and those who bought because they had nothing better to do, taking whatever pleasure they could in the possession of a thing desired by another.

Although the trend of the conversation during the dinner traveled from subject to subject, on cues discreetly dropped by the host himself, the participants did not enter whole-heartedly into the spirit of their discussions. There seemed to be a decided and distracting undercurrent of expectancy that grew more and more pronounced as the meal progressed. In spite of the interesting and timely themes advanced, the diners eagerly awaited the something that seemed imminent. Each knew, as positively as if their invitation had been so worded, that Mr. Kendrick had a surprise in store for them; that the comment and generalities were but a prelude to the thing anticipated.

It was with the coming of the coffee that Mr. Talbot, greatly to Ward's astonishment, mentioned viewing several of Murillo's canvases on exhibition in a London gallery. "It is to be regretted," Talbot went on to add, "that so many of that great artist's pictures have been lost. There are at least forty of them unaccounted for. Some undoubtedly have been destroyed, some lost, some few are probably in the hands of collectors who are not publishing the fact."

"We have the French to blame for that misfortune," said Mr. Kendrick. "The French invaders of Spain, it seems, were connoisseurs as well as soldiers."

Talbot nodded approvingly. "I recall to mind one canvas in particular,

mentioned in the history of that invasion," he said. "It has been said to surpass any other work the artist has done. It is one of the rare portraits Murillo executed after he attained recognition in his own country. If this canvas should be found, undamaged, and in a fair state of preservation, I do not hesitate to say that it would create a profound sensation in the art world."

"You refer, of course, to Murillo's 'Spanish Lady'?" said McGrath.

Talbot nodded. "I do." Once again Ward's pulse quickened; his lips tightened. He gave the appearance of one wrestling with an abstruse mental problem. Still he did not speak; but, with the others, waited for Talbot to go on. "It is a canvas," Talbot resumed, after an interval of silence, "which the artist himself prized above every other effort doubtless because the subject was so near and dear to him. It was a portrait, as we all know, of Murillo's daughter, Francisca."

"Its recovery has been frequently rumored," Ward forced himself to say.

Talbot nodded. "I have made several wild-goose chases in quest of it," he declared, warming up to the subject. "Two years ago, in Italy, I did find a monk who claimed to have unearthed the canvas in a nunnery where Francisca died, and parted with it for an insignificant sum. He described it so minutely that I believe he told me the truth. After hearing his story I tried to follow up what faint and unsatisfactory clews he had to offer, but my efforts were futile. I am almost convinced that the painting has been destroyed."

"I imagine," ventured Powell, who had been a most attentive listener to the story, "that the picture would be worth a small fortune to-day."

"I do not think fifty thousand dollars would be an extravagant sum to mention," Talbot answered readily.

"That's too conservative," chimed in McGrath. "Why, I know of a dozen men right here in this country who would pay a hundred thousand for it, and no questions asked, if convinced of its authenticity."

"Might as well put the offer at a million," Ward spoke up. "I'm of Mr. Talbot's opinion." He gazed steadily at the critic as he continued: "That Murillo is gone forever."

"I'm afraid so," Talbot agreed.

"If it is agreeable," suggested Mr. Kendrick, his eyes twinkling, "we will continue this interesting discussion in the gallery. I have recently acquired a painting that may invite criticism."

"In my opinion, Mr. Kendrick," Talbot said, rising with the others, "any canvas that you have acquired is quite beyond criticism."

"Thank you," the host rejoined, smiling. "However, this may prove the exception. May I be permitted to lead the way?"

The alert guests, requiring no second invitation, passed out of the dining room and down the corridor toward the gallery. Without being informed in so many words, the visitors knew that it was with this one object in view that Mr. Kendrick had brought them together. The dinner had been merely the overture before the play.

While the chattering guests seated themselves in the gallery chairs to face the velvet curtains and to speculate eagerly upon the canvas to be disclosed, Mr. Kendrick called his butler aside and questioned him. "You communicated with the power company, Dudley?" he asked.

"The very first thing," was the whispered answer. "They sent a man here. But he could find nothing wrong with the lights. They appeared to be in perfect condition. I can't quite make it out."

"Well, if the lights are behaving themselves now," Mr. Kendrick replied,

"we won't worry about what has passed. I'll look into the matter later on. You remember the instructions I gave you, Dudley?"

"Perfectly, sir."

"Very good." With this Mr. Kendrick, relieved and smiling now that his surprise was ready to break, walked briskly across the gallery floor, took up his position at one side of the curtain, and faced his expectant audience.

"I am honored," he began, his words echoing clearly in the hushed gallery, "in being permitted to address so representative and appreciative a gathering. I have, in the past, been rather miserly with my treasures. I realize, however, and each of you will bear me out, I am sure, that we are all more or less afflicted by jealousy and selfishness. We derive our greatest enjoyment in possessing, not in sharing. But I feel that the canvas I am to unveil to-night is so magnificent, so worthy, so incomparable, that to keep it hidden, to keep it only to myself, would be an unpardonable offense."

He paused and nodded, and Dudley, stationed at the gallery door, extinguished all the lights except those fitted in the border trough above the screened painting.

"To prepare you," Mr. Kendrick resumed, "I will state that, following years of patient effort, working quietly and persistently, I have at last been rewarded in the discovery and the possession of Bartolomé Murillo's finest example of portraiture. I think I may safely use the word finest without exaggeration. There is something in this canvas that is lacking in all others. Every tint, every brush stroke, breathes inspiration, devotion, an overpowering and mastering love—because the subject was so near and dear to the creator's heart."

"Portrait!" exclaimed McGrath, leaning forward in his chair, his twitching face barely visible in the semidarkness.

"A Murillo?" There was a world of concern in his tone.

"Yes," Mr. Kendrick answered slowly—and his words were tremulous in spite of his attempted control. "Murillo's portrait—of his daughter."

McGrath broke into a second exclamation, more violent than the first. Others in the room joined him. "The Spanish Lady?" he cried sharply.

Mr. Kendrick nodded, and paused a moment as if to allow the full significance of his statement to be grasped. "In ending," he said, after an interval, "I wish to repeat the words Mr. Talbot used earlier in the evening—'The finding of this masterpiece, undamaged, and in a fair state of preservation, will create a sensation in the art world.'"

His fingers tightened upon the cords, and the velvet curtain, obeying the summons, parted swiftly.

CHAPTER V.

ON WHAT DATE?

MR. KENDRICK'S eyes were fastened, not upon the canvas, but upon the peering, incredulous faces of his guests. In the moment following the disclosure of the painting, not a sound disturbed the hushed gallery. The occupants might have been taken for a collection of rigid wax figures. Then, as the plaudits of an audience follow the termination of an intense and gripping scene, a shout of approval went up, intermingled with laughter and the patter of hands.

Disconcerted by this unexpected and vociferous outburst, Mr. Kendrick turned. His glance fell upon the canvas. The picture he beheld in the massive gold frame, bathed in the glow of the electrics, transformed his countenance. But the expression was lost upon his audience, since he stood back in the shadows. "Pretty clever!" some one shouted above the laughter. "Congratulations, Mr. Kendrick!"

"When did you become a futurist adherent, Mr. Kendrick?"

"A silly joke!" growled McGrath, passing a hand across his flushed face, yet smiling in spite of himself.

Mr. Kendrick continued to stare at the canvas he had unveiled. It was a vivid and grotesque example of futurist fancy. The ungainly figure of a green-and-yellow crocodile, emerging from a shadowy, rock-fringed pool, stood out with startling contrast against a varicolored background of palm trees. Its dripping head was tipped shyly to one side, its cavernous mouth was partly open, its teeth gleamed wickedly; yet the big, topaz eyes were downcast and ridiculously demure. Upon the bank of the pool an unsuspecting negro boy dozed peacefully. The expression of the mighty animal, with uplifted foot, its tilted head and its abashed eyes, seemed to convey, too plainly, the feelings that must have assailed its tender, saurian heart. Had the creature been gifted with speech, it might have said: "Oh, dear! I do hope I haven't startled this trusting lad!"

On the lower part of the canvas, in brilliantly conspicuous letters, was the title: "The Bashful Crocodile."

The whole composition was so absurd, so utterly ridiculous and nonsensical, so different from what the guests had expected to see, that it was small wonder they greeted the caricature with gales of merriment, once the first shock had passed.

In the rear doorway of the gallery, his face marble white, his eyes bulging, stood Dudley. He gazed upon the painting as one might gaze upon an apparition. He was unobserved. Then abruptly his expression changed to one of grim determination and purpose. His arm shot out toward the wall buttons, and the lights blazed forth.

With the coming of the lights that brought the four walls of the gallery into life, the amused spectators trans-

ferred their attentions to their host. Mr. Kendrick was bowing delightedly, his face wreathed in smiles. To all appearances the outcome of what they had taken for his cleverly prepared surprise had fulfilled his every expectation.

Once the chairs had been pushed back and the conversation resumed, the guests, still chuckling over the unwonted surprise and the unsuspecting manner in which the whole affair had been staged, moved about the gallery.

Several of the men joined Mr. Kendrick, and gave the newly unveiled canvas a more deliberate inspection. "It certainly will create a profound sensation in the art circles," observed McGrath, cocking a speculative eye upon the painting. "Look closely, gentlemen!" he went on. "Have you ever seen a more perfect rendering of the family crocodilia? Murillo has excelled himself! He has displayed a keen insight, a remarkable spirit of daring! What other master would have ventured to select so humble and ugly a subject? Daring is the only word for it, gentlemen!"

"There is no question of that," Powell agreed. "None at all. It is amazing. And look there in the foliage! Just to the left of the mighty saurian! Upon my soul, it is a species of the plover, the boon companion of the crocodile—his alarm clock, I might say!"

"That isn't a plover," McGrath disputed. "It's a fern."

"Reminds me of the studies I used to make in school," chimed in another observer. "Had I been given the proper encouragement in my youth, I might have rivaled Murillo."

"Have you ever seen a more marvelous and lifelike expression upon a crocodile's features?" asked Powell. "A more subtle rendering of modesty? Murillo has tried to show us that even these ungainly denizens of the swamps were possessed of feelings. And what charm there is in the reclining figure of

the drowsy blackamoor! How suggestive of the South! And the background, gentlemen! I ask you to observe it closely. Those filmy blossoms of the cotton shrubs——"

"Cotton shrubs!" scoffed McGrath, interrupting the eulogy. "Absurd! Those are palm trees!"

"I leave it to you, Mr. Kendrick," Powell said, turning toward his host. "Are they cotton shrubs or palm trees?"

"It isn't for me to say, gentlemen," Mr. Kendrick replied, entering into the spirit of the argument. "An observer must be a judge unto himself. The truth is apparent only to those who can appreciate the latent beauties of the composition."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Halsey, who had been standing before the canvas, and now joined in the discussion for the first time. "I like the thing! No joking! I do like it! It's so—so blamed odd. So different from anything I have ever seen before."

"It's odd, all right," agreed McGrath.

After Mrs. Halsey had taken her husband in tow, Ward came down to join the group of men. He was smiling, but the smile had been assumed only a moment before. "I wonder how many of us recall the date," he exclaimed. "Isn't to-day the first of April?"

"Good Lord! So it is!" cried Powell. "Never gave it a thought. Now we have the explanation, gentlemen! Mr. Kendrick has certainly taken us in for fair. Murillo's long-lost canvas! His charming daughter! Oh, my, that's rich! And for a time I actually believed our host was telling us the truth!"

"You weren't alone in your belief," supplemented McGrath. "I was so keyed up over the veiled canvas that I haven't yet recovered. Why, I was all ready to make a bid—and a mighty stiff one at that."

"I'm sorry I've disappointed you," Mr. Kendrick said, and there was a

perceptible change in his tone. "Really sorry."

Talbot, who had been inspecting the other canvases on the gallery walls, overheard the last remark and strolled down to join the group of men surrounding the host. "If you had not disappointed us, Mr. Kendrick," he said quietly, "I would have outbid any man in the room."

McGrath looked around, his eyes twinkling shrewdly. "We're all laboring under the impression that Mr. Kendrick would have consented to sell the canvas, aren't we? Another example of counting our chickens before they're hatched."

"There is a price for everything," asserted Talbot slowly; "even for Murillo's Spanish Lady."

"Was the April-fool prank a surprise to you, Mr. Talbot?" Ward asked.

"I was disappointed, to say the least," the critic answered, "despite the fact that I built up my expectations against my better judgment."

"I fear that in the attempt to mislead my audience I exceeded my intentions," Mr. Kendrick said. "Perhaps I should apologize."

"No need of that," declared McGrath. "The joke's on us, and it is our place to compliment you. Had we used a little common sense, we wouldn't have fallen so hard. Am I right, Mr. Talbot?"

"Perfectly," Talbot replied, and as he spoke he met Ward's steady glance. "Mr. Kendrick deserves all the credit. Our host carried out his plans very cleverly indeed. By the way, is the Bashful Crocodile for sale?"

"A moment ago you said there was a price for everything," the art collector replied.

"What do you want with it?" asked McGrath.

"Well, I might keep the picture as a souvenir of my visit to America," Talbot said, and laughed.

"Not a bad idea," Powell agreed.

"Any bid you care to make will be accepted," Mr. Kendrick said.

"That's fair enough," chimed in McGrath. "We won't bid against you, Talbot. Offer him nine-ninety-eight, cash."

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Kendrick," Talbot announced. "I'll give you a signed check, and you may fill in the amount to suit yourself—the money to go to any charity you suggest."

"Done!" Mr. Kendrick declared. "The Bashful Crocodile is sold to Mr. Talbot. Will you take it with you? Or shall I send it to your hotel?"

"I'll take it with me later," said Talbot.

CHAPTER VI.

"WELL, YOUNG MAN?"

WHEN the laughter that greeted the ridiculous bargain had subsided, Dudley appeared at the gallery door, sighted Mr. Kendrick, and came toward him. "Begging your pardon, sir," he began, "but there is a gentleman in the hall to see you—a reporter from the *Review*."

"Reporter? What does he want?" asked Kendrick.

"I don't know, sir. He insists upon speaking with you."

"Send him away! How many times have I told you, Dudley, not to encourage these chaps? I have nothing to say; nothing the *Review* cares to hear, at least."

"Oh, ho!" exclaimed Powell. "Your joke's out already. What do you know about that? Talk about the wireless—you can't keep anything from those confounded newspapers! Some one has tipped them off."

"It's too good to keep," vowed Ward. "Why not let them have the straight of it, Mr. Kendrick?"

Mr. Kendrick hesitated a moment; then, as if Ward's suggestion had ap-

pealed to him, he turned toward the waiting butler. "All right, Dudley. Show the reporter in here. We'll see how much he knows."

"In here, sir?" Dudley questioned, surprised.

"Certainly! We're all interested."

As the butler reluctantly obeyed, Mr. Kendrick stepped over and quickly closed the velvet curtains to screen the Bashful Crocodile. Presently, with very scant consideration, Dudley bowed the reporter into the gallery. The newspaper man came briskly forward—a clean-cut, dapper young chap with a stick in the crook of his arm and a tightly rolled cap in one hand. "Mr. Kendrick?" he inquired.

Mr. Kendrick nodded. "What's wanted, young man?"

"I'm from the *Review*. I've been commissioned to get an interview and a complete description of your new painting," the reporter announced glibly.

"How long have you been with the *Review*?" asked Kendrick.

"Not very long," the reporter admitted.

"I thought so; otherwise you would know that I do not grant interviews."

"But the editor thought this was an exceptional case, Mr. Kendrick," said the young man eagerly.

"Why so exceptional?"

"You have lately come into the possession of so remarkable a painting that it is only fair—" The reporter stopped and frowned, as the guests with one accord broke into shouts of laughter.

"You've even buffaloed the press, Mr. Kendrick!" Powell cried.

Mr. Kendrick, however, did not smile. "What is this remarkable painting?" he inquired.

"I was given to understand it was a Murillo," the reporter answered.

Another outburst greeted this statement, and the *Review* representative flushed. He looked upon the faces about

him as if to seek an explanation. "Well, young man," Mr. Kendrick announced, when the other men had quieted down, "since you have fathomed the great secret, it is no more than fair that you should have the honor to gaze upon the masterpiece."

The reporter's face brightened as Mr. Kendrick stepped back, and, with an elaborate bow, drew aside the velvet curtains. There followed a moment of absolute silence, in which the reporter gazed, wide-eyed and dumbly, upon the Bashful Crocodile. The other men watched him with unconcealed interest. Then, with an embarrassed grin, the *Review* man turned questioningly toward Mr. Kendrick. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Kendrick," he began; "but if—"

"Is that all the impression the Murillo has made upon you?" Mr. Kendrick demanded, with a show of indignation. "Is that all you can say?"

"I appreciate the joke," the reporter admitted, smiling faintly.

"Joke? Is that the way you treat the courtesy I have shown you?"

"I'm not an art critic, Mr. Kendrick," the other said; "but I know a joke when I see one."

"If you'll look closely at the painting, you'll see the artist's signature," McGrath broke in. "What better proof do you want?"

"Get Murillo on the phone," said Powell. "He'll verify the canvas."

"Where's your photographer?" inquired Ward. "The *Review* will want a photograph of the masterpiece."

The reporter looked so uncomfortable and undecided that Mr. Kendrick relented and broke into the laugh he had withheld. "Young man," he explained, "that is the painting you have come to see. We won't prolong your suffering. It is the nearest thing to a Murillo I have ever possessed. Tell your editor that, will you?"

"I'm afraid he won't believe me."

"Why not?" asked Kendrick.

"Because," the reporter answered, "from the information he received to-day he is certain that you have Murillo's Spanish Lady. None of the other papers has been tipped off, and we intend to score a beat. It is understood that you have given this house party for the purpose of unveiling the masterpiece. I have been commissioned to get the whole story, Mr. Kendrick."

"Say, this is immense!" exclaimed McGrath. "The *Review* has been stung with the rest of us." He turned upon the reporter. "Can't you appreciate the situation, young man? You're not that thick-headed, are you? This is the first day in April. All Fools' Day! Do I make myself clear? Mr. Kendrick has turned a neat little trick on all of us."

To McGrath's chagrin, as well as to the surprise of the others in the room, the reporter did not accept the explanation in the spirit he was expected to show. His countenance remained unruffled. "Heavens!" McGrath went on, annoyed at the man's indifferent demeanor. "Must I draw a diagram for you?"

"I have come fifty miles for this story," the reporter said quietly, "and I'm not going back to New York without it."

At this deliberate and unexpected rejoinder, Mr. Kendrick's face hardened perceptibly. "Dudley!" he commanded sharply. "Kindly show this gentleman out of the house!"

"Yes, sir," responded Dudley.

The reporter bowed slightly, and walked to the gallery door, where the butler awaited him. Reaching there, he wheeled to face his observers. "I only wanted to make it perfectly clear to you, Mr. Kendrick," he declared, in the same placid tone of voice, "that I have not been deceived or misled by the foolery. When you see fit to treat this matter in the proper way, you'll find me

at your service. I'll be within call. Thank you. Good evening."

The departure of the confident reporter was followed by an interval of tense and awkward silence on the part of Mr. Kendrick and the guests who surrounded him. Fortunately the ladies and a few of the younger men had left the gallery previous to the recently enacted scene, and were not aware of the unpleasant interruption. The sudden outburst of music from an adjoining room, coming at that moment—as if at an unheard cue—succeeded, in a measure, in relieving the situation. And by the time Dudley reappeared, smiling blandly over a task that obviously had not been distasteful to him, the conversation was resumed.

Unnoticed by his guests, Mr. Kendrick stepped out of the gallery. When he reached the corridor, Paula, who had followed him, touched his arm.

"Father!" she said anxiously. "Why did you keep this surprise from me?"

Mr. Kendrick turned. "I did not know it was to come," he answered quietly.

The girl stared at him dumbly, as if unable to grasp the significance of his reply; then, as the truth came to her suddenly, cruelly, she shrank back against the wall with a low cry. "Father! You did not know? And the Murillo—" Her voice broke pitifully.

"It is gone," he said.

"Gone?" she echoed helplessly. "Where?"

"I do not know. It was there, behind the curtains, this afternoon. And to-night, when I drew the curtains aside —" He stopped and left the rest unsaid.

"Some one stole it? Some one substituted that other canvas?" Paula faltered weakly.

Mr. Kendrick nodded. The girl clutched his arm. "What will you do?

Why—why did you let the guests think it was a joke? You must tell them."

The collector gazed steadily into his daughter's white face. "Paula," he said—and his voice was stronger now—"you must say nothing of this. Do you understand me? Nothing! No one must know."

The girl lifted her eyes. The sight of her father's grimly set jaws checked the torrent of questions that rushed to her lips. "Very well," she answered. "I will say nothing."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WRONG DOOR.

SEVERAL of the men guests, among them Talbot and Ward, left the gallery for more comfortable quarters in the smoking room, where Dudley passed around a well-stocked humidor. With an audible sigh of relief, McGrath established himself in an easy-chair before the fire. There was a chill in the April air that succeeded in penetrating brick walls and plaster, and the cheery warmth of a bright wood fire did not come amiss.

"To misquote Kipling," he observed, lighting his cigar with a deliberate and enjoyable anticipation, "a picture is only a picture, but a good cigar's a smoke."

When Ward and Talbot drew up their chairs before the fire, the subject of the reporter's visit was mentioned. "Of all the impudent cads!" McGrath expressed himself forcibly. "Why didn't he call Mr. Kendrick a liar and be done with it? If this had happened in my house, that reporter would have been kicked out bodily."

"The thing that puzzles me," Talbot said, "is how the *Review* got hold of so absurd a story. Was some one trying to hoodwink the editor?"

McGrath shook his head. "In my opinion," he ventured, "some of the fellows in the newspaper office put up a

job on the new reporter—sent him down here on a wild-goose chase. The older men know how Mr. Kendrick detests newspaper notoriety, and wanted the cub to tackle him."

"He said he intended remaining on the job until he got the story," said Talbot.

"He'll lose his job if he stays too long," said McGrath.

Ward, his mind still troubled over the identity of the guest seated next to him, struggled with countless plans that might tend to relieve his apprehension, only to discard them one after another. Now that things had progressed so far without unnecessary alarm, Ward felt that he should have acquainted Mr. Kendrick with the situation he had so unexpectedly uncovered, at the time he confided in Paula. It was Mr. Kendrick's privilege to deal with the matter in whatever manner he saw fit and proper. Ward felt that in keeping his suspicions to himself he was doing his host an injustice. He had sought an opportunity of speaking with the girl at the conclusion of the dinner, and again following the scene staged in the gallery; but his maneuvers failed on both occasions. He concluded at last that Paula either had dismissed her fears or was trusting implicitly in his having shouldered the responsibility. Both deductions pleased him.

Scarcely had Ward settled back with these comforting thoughts uppermost in his mind when a new and disturbing possibility ousted them. The more he pondered over the question, the more uncertain he became. He stole a swift and cautious sidelong glance at Talbot, whose chair was within arm's reach, but the object of his scrutiny appeared to be absorbed in a problem of his own building, and seemed unconscious of the look.

Suddenly McGrath bestirred himself, removed the cigar from between his lips, and directed a question at Ward.

"Oh, by the way," he began, "didn't you bring a picture here to-day?"

Ward's fingers, playing a tattoo upon the arm of his chair, stiffened. He saw Talbot's countenance change perceptibly as the new subject was introduced. "Just because I brought a canvas with me, rolled up under my arm," Ward said, with a laugh, "I trust you do not think I've made away with a *Mona Lisa!*"

"Oh, hardly that," McGrath returned good-naturedly; "but I overheard you mention something about a picture to Mr. Kendrick early this afternoon, that's all. Perhaps you didn't want it repeated. You'll pardon me if I've been too curious," he added.

"The canvas really amounts to nothing," Ward explained lightly. "A trifle unusual in treatment, and—well, I purchased it with a certain buyer in mind. I wanted to ask Mr. Kendrick's opinion of its value."

"Where'd you pick it up?"

"In Boston," was the reply.

"Oh!" McGrath's brows lifted. "At Hepplewait's?" Ward's teeth sank into his cigar as he nodded. "Once in a while Hepplewait offers something worth while," McGrath went on. "Not often, though. What's the subject?"

"A landscape—rather broad and sketchy—good in spots," answered Ward. "It'll appeal to the patron I have in mind."

"Not one of Bayley's, is it?" Talbot inquired.

"No." Ward shook his head. "Greymont's."

"That so?" Talbot betrayed an immediate interest. "He's done some very excellent work in landscapes. I'd like to see the canvas, Mr. Ward, if it isn't asking too much."

"Certainly," Ward responded. "I'll be only too happy to show it to you. Just remind me in the morning, will you? I haven't unpacked the prize."

"Thank you," said Talbot, in a tone that left little doubt of his appreciation. "I'll look forward to the privilege with interest, I assure you. I might even take the canvas off your hands," he added smilingly.

A few minutes later the group of three dispersed. Ward finished his cigar and went out to join Paula and the others in the big music room. McGrath said he was far too comfortable to be disturbed, but added that he would follow them presently. "I'm not much for music," he explained, "or dancing, either. I wouldn't know a fox trot from a canter."

Talbot followed Ward out of the smoking room. Mr. Kendrick, who had reappeared upon the scene, went forward to meet the critic. He was beaming pleasantly, and seemed to have entered into the gay spirit of the evening with as much zest and enjoyment as the others.

"I'm afraid I have neglected you, Talbot," he apologized quickly; "but you will have to pardon me this time. I've been showing the ladies how little I know about the modern dances and the——"

"Oh, not at all!" Talbot interrupted. "The pleasure of the ladies is always first, and—and I've found Mr. Ward a most agreeable companion."

Ward became aware, not without concern, that Talbot, for all his apparent interest in the other guests, kept Mr. Kendrick and himself under a steady surveillance. For that reason he was unable to confide his growing suspicions to his host. He did manage at last, however, to draw Paula aside and speak with her concerning the matter that had been too long delayed.

"Tell your father I want to see him, Miss Kendrick," he said, in an undertone, still conscious that Talbot was watching them from the opposite side of the room.

"Have you found out anything

more?" the girl questioned. There was an unlooked-for tremor in her voice.

"Nothing definitely," answered Ward. He searched the girl's troubled countenance narrowly, as if to seek more information than she was willing to extend in words. Her obvious agitation disturbed and puzzled him. "You must not permit yourself to be unduly alarmed," he said quietly. "There is nothing to fear, whatever the outcome may be. I'm sorry now that I spoke to you of the matter."

Powell came up at that moment, and further comment was impossible. Ward masked his feelings with a smile, and strolled away, to be at once corralled by an unsuspecting and talkative soap manufacturer, Halsey. He listened absently to Halsey's chatter; but, not being in a particularly receptive mood to discuss the merits of a projected advertising scheme wherein the Bashful Crocodile was to play an important part, he managed to discourage his tormentor and slip away.

During the time that Ward was in earnest conversation with Paula, Talbot was engaged with Mr. Kendrick. Later, apparently preoccupied, the critic murmured something about joining McGrath for a final smoke, and left the room.

Once out of sight, however, he quickened his pace, saw to his evident satisfaction, as he passed the doorway of the smoking room, that McGrath was sleeping peacefully in the big chair before the open fire, tiptoed on, reached the foot of the stairs, and swiftly ascended them.

On the upper floor he paused, and, before venturing farther, looked anxiously around. The lights were burning low under the heavy shades, and the big hall was in semidarkness. With a resolute set to his shoulders, and a final, questioning glance about him, Talbot moved across the rug-strewn floor,

and stopped in front of the door his eyes had marked.

The knob turned readily in his fingers, and the door opened without effort. Talbot was just stepping into the darkened room when a sound arrested him, and he stiffened suddenly.

Like the genii summoned from the air, Dudley appeared. He came toward Talbot, his face calm and immobile. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said respectfully, "but that is Mr. Ward's apartment. Yours is at the opposite end of the hall, sir."

"Oh!" Talbot exclaimed, stepping back embarrassedly. "How stupid of me! I didn't realize where I was going. The doors are—are so very much alike that—"

"Yes, sir," Dudley agreed. "They are rather confusing. Allow me to direct you, sir."

"Thank you," Talbot said, as the butler opened the right door and stepped aside. "I'll keep my wits about me next time," he added, pressing a wadded bank note into the servant's hand. He watched as Dudley bowed and moved quietly down the hall in the direction of the stairs; then he stepped inside his own room, noiselessly turned the key in the lock, and listened with his ear pressed against the panel of the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIRES DOWN.

THE persistent ringing of a bell and the sharp, staccato reports of a discharged firearm brought the guests in the music room up on their feet. With an exclamation that was not lost upon Ward, who instinctively whirled to face his host, Mr. Kendrick darted out of the room, and ran down the long corridor toward the stairs. Ward and the other men, too astounded to question the move, yet confident that something unusual had taken place, followed.

In the upper hall, Dudley appeared

and called out to attract the attention of the excited guests.

"It's in Mr. Talbot's apartment, sir!" he cried.

Led by Mr. Kendrick, the men rushed into Talbot's room. They found him standing before an opened window, a revolver clutched grimly in his hand, but he was smiling.

"What's the trouble?" Mr. Kendrick asked.

Talbot, more composed than any of the others, slowly turned to face his agitated host. "Sorry to create all this disturbance, Mr. Kendrick," he explained; "but I thought to frighten away an unannounced visitor."

"Visitor?" Mr. Kendrick repeated. "Who was it? Where did you see him?"

"I was standing in front of my dresser," Talbot said, "when I heard a sound at this window. Glancing up, I saw a man's face peering in at me. I made for him, but he dropped—all the way to the ground, I fancy—and started to run. In my haste I fired through the window. After I succeeded in opening it, I tried to wing the man as he darted across the lawn. Better have some of your men search the grounds, Mr. Kendrick," he added significantly. "I believe I hit the fellow."

Dudley, obeying a quick nod from his employer, hurried away, the rest of the men following him. Once outside, the guests scattered and searched the darker parts of the lawn and the hedges. Talbot soon joined them, revolver in hand, and, with Ward and Dudley, explored the grounds in the vicinity of the house.

"I could have sworn that last shot hit the fellow," Talbot declared, apparently as disappointed as his companions. "I thought I saw him stumble."

"There are no marks below the window," announced Ward, who had dropped behind the others and was flashing an electric torch over the lawn.

"It doesn't seem possible that a——" He broke off suddenly, as the darting shaft of light picked out an object in the grass. His hand shot out, and, without being observed by the others, he secured the thing and slipped it into his pocket.

"What were you saying?" Talbot inquired, turning back to where Ward stood.

"I said I didn't think it possible that a man could drop from the window ledge and alight on the ground without leaving some evidence," Ward answered quietly.

"The ground is pretty well frozen," Talbot said.

"That might account for it."

"The thing that puzzles me," chimed in Powell, measuring the distance with a calculating eye, "is how the chap got up to the window ledge in the first place."

"I was about to ask the same question," said Mr. Kendrick. "How was it done?"

Ward shook his head. "That seems to be a mystery. Perhaps we'll find out later."

"The fellow was up there, all right," Talbot reiterated; "but how he reached the ledge is something that I can't explain."

"It's a wonder the fellow didn't break a leg," said Powell.

"Those chaps know how to fall," said Talbot, ready with an explanation.

"Shall I phone the police?" anxiously inquired Dudley.

"Not yet," Mr. Kendrick replied. "There's no damage done—so far as we know—and it isn't likely our visitor will return. Besides, I'm not going to put a cloud on our house party by inviting a crowd of detectives! I'd rather contend with a crook than a detective any day."

"I agree with you," said Talbot, laughing with the others.

During the absence of the men, a

few of the women rushed to their respective apartments to assure themselves that none of their belongings had been taken. Quieted and relieved when they found nothing had been disturbed, they gathered in the hall to await the return of the posse.

When the men appeared, shivering and bareheaded—for none of them had taken the trouble to don overcoat or hat in the sudden rush to apprehend the unknown visitor—they made a common move toward the smoking room, huddling gratefully about the open fire which a thoughtful servant had replenished.

"Enjoyable weather for a garden fête," said Powell, his teeth chattering, "or a midnight dip in the pool! I say, Mr. Kendrick," he went on, as if the question had just come to him, "what was all that confounded bell ringing? Sounded like a vaudeville musical act on strike."

"Every window in the house is connected with a burglar alarm," the host explained, smiling. "It is a precaution I have always taken. We are three miles from the nearest village and the town constable—and I'm running no chances."

"A wise precaution," agreed Talbot.

"I thought at first it was another of your April-fool pranks," declared Powell. "Then I heard the shots and saw you make for the stairs and concluded I was wrong."

"Our visitor displayed plenty of nerve," Talbot remarked. "We'll have to admit that. He isn't the ordinary sneak thief, or the second-story man we read about in the newspapers. Breaking into a house filled with people, and at this time of the night, proves that beyond a doubt."

"Must have had a big object in view," commented Ward. He saw Mr. Kendrick start suddenly, then as suddenly recover himself.

"Mr. Kendrick's house is naturally a

place to attract crooks—the big ones," said McGrath, whose peaceful slumbers had been ended by the disturbance. "This chap that Talbot shot at never came here to rifle coat pockets," he added significantly. "He had a more important errand in mind."

"If I hadn't been so badly rattled, I might have trapped him," Talbot said dismally.

"You gave him a mighty good scare," maintained Powell, "and that's a lot more than I could have done."

"It was fortunate that you had a revolver with you at the time," Ward spoke up.

"First time I've carried one in years," Talbot answered.

"Is every one certain there has been nothing taken?" Ward asked, looking around him at the circle of interested faces. "This might have been the man's second appearance," he added.

"Oh, I—I hardly think so," Mr. Kendrick announced quickly.

"There doesn't seem to be anything missing from the rooms upstairs," said Paula. "We went through them while you were outside."

"Permit me to compliment you," Talbot said, with a laugh. "Your bravery is unquestionable. I'll never refer to you as one of the weaker sex after this."

"We mustn't allow this affair to spoil our evening," the host declared quickly. "They say lightning never strikes twice in the same place, and I'm sure the argument holds equally in respect to burglars."

"Of course it does!" Powell said. "On with the dance! Let joy be unconfined! I read that somewhere in a book," he acknowledged, "but it is quite in keeping with this occasion, isn't it?"

Following Powell's lead, the guests drifted away to the other rooms. Talbot disappeared with Paula. McGrath settled down before the fire to enjoy a smoke. It was the opportune moment Ward had looked forward to, and he

hurried out into the hall to overtake Mr. Kendrick.

"May I speak with you a moment?" he asked, reaching his host's side.

"Certainly," Mr. Kendrick said. "What's on your mind?"

"I should have confided in you earlier this evening," Ward said, "but circumstances interfered, and—well, I didn't want to trouble you until I was certain of my suspicions."

"Suspicions?" Mr. Kendrick echoed sharply. "What do you mean? What suspicions?" The smile faded from his lips.

"If I might speak with you alone?" suggested Ward.

With a promptness that astonished Ward, his host turned and opened a door leading into a small, richly furnished room. Once inside, Mr. Kendrick switched on the lights. A big antique desk and well-filled bookcases occupied one side of the room. The tapestried walls were covered with many unframed paintings. On the broad mantelpiece and on the several tables and even ranged on the floor in apparent disorder were porcelains of every conceivable size and color, bronzes and ornaments in other metals.

Ward looked about him in sheer amazement, nor was that amazement entirely dispelled by Mr. Kendrick's quiet laugh and explanation. "I call this my junk pile," Mr. Kendrick said, "and it looks it, don't you agree? Now what was it you wanted to confide in me?" he went on, after a pause. "You may speak freely, Mr. Ward. I do not think we shall be interrupted—or overheard."

"Mr. Kendrick," Ward began quietly, determined not to waste any time in preliminaries, "what do you know about Talbot?"

"Nothing, except that he is a prominent art critic who arrived on Friday from London. He is the representative

of several wealthy European collectors, and—"

"You never saw him until to-night?" Ward interrupted.

"No."

"I understand that he is a Londoner, and that this is his first visit to this country," Ward stated.

"Yes," Mr. Kendrick agreed.

"Then did you not wonder at his American accent?"

"Why, I did notice it," Mr. Kendrick answered, after a moment of reflection, "but I did not attach a great deal of significance to the fact at the time."

"You are quite satisfied, then, that the guest now in your house, answering to the name of Talbot, is the London critic?"

"Why, I am fairly certain of it," Mr. Kendrick replied, apparently taken aback by the very abruptness of the question. "I am not in the habit of cross-examining my guests before admitting them," he went on, in a slight tone of resentment. "I mailed an invitation to Mr. Talbot's hotel in New York. He promptly and courteously acknowledged it, and said he would be delighted to visit me."

"Then, so far this evening, you have found no reason to suspect that he is other than the man you invited?" persisted Ward.

Mr. Kendrick regarded his companion with a tolerant and questioning glance. "What are you driving at, Ward?" he demanded.

"Just this," Ward answered swiftly: "I am convinced that the Mr. Talbot you are entertaining is an impostor. By some trick, which we may succeed in uncovering later, this man intercepted the invitation you mailed, and has passed himself off as the critic." Before the astounded host could interrupt him, Ward went on to relate minutely the conversation that took place between himself and Talbot concerning the au-

thenticity of the canvas in the smoking room.

"I can't believe it!" Mr. Kendrick exclaimed, when Ward paused for breath; nevertheless the color drained from his face as he continued: "It's absurd! Why should any one seek to gain admission to my home in so despicable a manner?"

"I hardly think it necessary for me to answer that question," Ward replied.

Mr. Kendrick winced ever so slightly and parted his lips as if to speak; then, as if unwilling to voice the fear that surged into his heart, he checked the impulse and remained silent.

Ward watched him almost pityingly. "Mr. Kendrick," he said at length, in quiet earnestness, "why do you want to keep me in ignorance of what has taken place?"

A sudden flame of resentment burned in the collector's steel-gray eyes. "What do you mean?" he demanded.

"This evening, after the canvas was unveiled, I purposely mentioned the fact that to-day was the first of April. I did it to help you, Mr. Kendrick."

"Then Paula has told you?" Mr. Kendrick cried.

"No," said Ward. "Paula did not tell me. I was not aware that she knew. But from the very first I suspected. I did not believe that you had bidden your friends here for the purpose of unveiling the Bashful Crocodile. I couldn't believe it."

Mr. Kendrick sank into a chair. Now that the truth had been suspected, he seemed resigned and at the point of confessing the thing he had held back.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The next section of this novel will be found in the number of TOP-NOTCH issued and dated May 15th. This magazine is published twice a month—on the 1st and 15th.



WHEN MAY SPEAKS

By Ethel Hallett

MAY speaks in the voices of busy brooks,
In the singing of wind in the grasses,
From her smiling skies, ever downward looks
On all her daintily bowered nooks
That the lazy bumblebee passes.

May loves the little and helpless things—
She shelters each frail, tiny fellow,
And hovers protecting mother wings
O'er every struggling life that sings
In her breezes gentle and mellow.

We welcome you blithely with loving arms,
And the earth her joy confesses;
You creep up daintily with your charms,
With lavish giving and upturned palms,
And healing in your caresses.

Talks With Top-Notch Readers

By BURT L. STANDISH

WHEN SUCCESS MEETS SUCCESS

HIGH in the seats of the happy is the editor who, having finished his task of building the next number, can feel that it is going to give entertainment and delight to thousands and thousands of readers. It affords me keen pleasure to tell you that the TOP-NOTCH dated May 15th—the one to come to you on that day—measures up to such a standard.

Another source of joy for the editor is the knowledge that the readers have scored a success—that is to say that they have succeeded in enjoying what the editor has prepared for them. Thus, you see, successes meet and clasp hands. Eagerly the editor awaits evidences of the readers' success. If you did not like the number, he would conclude that, after all, he did not build well for you—indeed, that he did not build for you at all, but, without being aware of it, for some other group of readers. That would be a keen disappointment.



ALL our effort, as you know, is to construct a worthy magazine, as well as one that shall receive your approval. Such an enterprise means a lot more to the publisher to-day than it did a few years back—that is, it means a lot more to the new kind of publisher. Time was when a publisher, as represented by an editor, sat in his chair and waited for good things to fall into his lap. From the windfall of the mails he chose the best or the worst or the intermediate, and his periodical was good, bad, or indifferent accordingly. His position was describable with the expression “pretty soft.”



BUT one day there arose another kind of publisher—one who enlisted the services of an editor who did not wait for things to come in, but who went after them. From that moment our slow-going friend and his magazine were out of date, although he did not recognize this at the time. Catching the events of life, big or little, wise

or foolish, and causing them to be woven into tales that shall stir and delight—there is a task demanding all that the new kind of publisher can muster of alertness and skill. But you do not wish to live always in the strenuous present when you give yourselves up to the enjoyment of fiction; so well do we know it that some of the material used in building for you is the stuff of which dear old romance may be made.



FOR example, in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH there is a story told in a distinctly modern way, a boxing tale. Yet its time is far from the present, and its people far from the men and women of our day. I suppose it would be called a colonial romance. The title is "His Sporting Chance," and the author is J. C. Kofoed, who gave us a good tale of like strain some time ago. You are going to enjoy this work of Mr. Kofoed, I feel quite certain.



THE same number will contain a laughable affair by J. A. Fitzgerald, called "His Elegance the Janitor." Another humorous story—a baseball tale—is by Frank X. Finnegan; title, "Hazlitt's Alibi." Other athletic features are Dorrance's college rowing serial, "As the Arrow to the Bow," and a clever tennis story by Octavus Roy Cohen called "Advantage In." The long complete novel is by William MacLeod Raine—"Law and the Man"—and I think you will say it is one of the best things this popular author has ever given to the public. Among the other attractions is a splendid railroad story by the man who has made that type of fiction famous—William Wallace Cook.



FROM Percy A. Bukolzer, of Jackson Avenue, Long Island City, New York, we have this:

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Allow me to express my appreciation of your splendid magazine. He is indeed hard to suit who cannot find the story he likes in TOP-NOTCH. I know one fellow whose aversion to TOP-NOTCH was based entirely upon the fact that it was not bound in book form. He would never read them in magazine form, but the instant the stories were published in the books such as the Camera Chap tales, he bought them. I am glad to say, however, that I persuaded him to take the magazine when I made him see that,

besides his favorite story, the magazine was just full of other stories.

I will not ask you to publish this letter, as I know you receive hundreds of letters daily asking this. It only proves the scope of your magazine. Long Island City, even with its nearness to New York, has not, I think, had the honor of being heard of in the form of a letter; at least, I have not seen any since I have been a reader of TOP-NOTCH, which is rather long.

For clean, interesting fiction the stories you publish can't be beaten. I don't think Steve Blake is at his best in this latest serial—that is, in some parts Mr. Fitzgerald appears to have "stretched" the comedy. Of course, if one accepts the story as one huge farce, it

goes. The author surely is a gloom dis-peller. I wish you the best of success for the magazine, which appears to have reached its zenith.

A word in regard to the above reader's remark about the hundreds of letters we receive and his not asking us to publish the one he sends. It will be seen at a glance that we are not able to publish all the letters received. We should like to, but we know that such a course would trench too much on the space that should be given to stories. We do the best we can to give our contributing editors representation in the "Talk" pages. Do not send us anonymous communications if you would see them in print. We will withhold your name and address from publication if you so request, but they must be included if you wish your letter to receive any notice.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: I think your magazine is the best ever—always a story to suit everybody. Your sport stories are all O. K. Steve Blake was fine. "At the Keystone Sack" gets more interesting in each installment. Could you let me know when the story entitled "Tagged in Toronto" was published, and if I can get it from your office. Thanking you in advance, I remain, yours truly, T. R.

"Tagged in Toronto" appeared in our issue of December 15, 1912, and can be obtained by sending an order to this office. This is true of all back numbers, except in the cases of those issues that have been exhausted.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Inclosed please find a money order for three dollars, for which extend my subscription to the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE for another year.

It is the best of all fiction magazines. I like the stories written by Burt L. Standish best, and then comes Terhune, Cooke, Fitzgerald, Phillips, and Dorrance. Yours truly, Portland, Ore. REUBEN E. VOSS.



FROM two readers in New York—Charles Levison and Martin Lefkowitz, of Kelly Street, the Bronx—we have this:

Just a line to inform you of the satisfaction the TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE gives us. We especially like the stories by Bertram Lebhar, and hope he will write another Camera Chap story. Please get busy yourself, and give us a serial baseball story. We were delighted with Lebhar's "A Fish and a Gentleman." We could hardly wait to see how it ended. Our favorite authors are Fitzgerald, yourself, Lebhar, Boston, Phillips—in fact, all of them are good. The only story we did not like was "Under the Whip." Please get Mr. Patten busy on another Boltwood of Yale story. As we are not fond of stories of the sea, we do not like Mr. Shaw's stories. Will Gage Carey is very good. "On Post" was the best story ever written in TOP-NOTCH, in our opinion, and all my friends liked it. Give us some more photo-play stories.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Although I am not a regular subscriber to your periodical, I am very well pleased with the stories, and am always looking forward eagerly for the next edition.

I noted with interest and pleasure the letter from Mr. Rabbits, of St. John's, Newfoundland, for, being a native of that island, I have been waiting and watching to see in your columns an expression from one of my countrymen of the pleasure derived from TOP-NOTCH.

While all of the stories are good, naturally individual preferences differ, so that the scope of the book must be such as to be interesting to all. Personally I liked such stories as "At the Look-in Corner," "Lefty Locke," "Boltwood of Yale," "Steve Blake," "The Camera Chap," and "Around the World in Thirty Days."

Wishing you continued success with, I am, Yours truly, (MRS.) ANNIE DEAN.

St. Marks Avenue, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: When I bring T.-N. down to the office it is always a mix-up to see who gets it next. Many of your stories are excellent, the one "On Post," and the "Northwest Mounted," could not be improved on. Some are rather dry, but these are few.

My copy is read by at least ten people. Please try to bring back "Bourke Bronson" and the Northwest Mounted tales, as they have the pep.

The main factors in your stories show brain power instead of brute strength. I believe that the general public is sick of the "rough stone age" stuff, and would prefer a scientific hero instead of a two-gun man. Very truly yours, GEO. D. KING.

Lincoln Avenue, Syracuse, N. Y.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Two succulent semimonthly chunks, by all means—224 pages, with plenty of baseball, sport, railroad, and adventure stories.

Do not make the complete novels longer. Magazine literature is flooded with that kind. Keep TOP-NOTCH in the foremost position by adhering to the principles which have made it notable. Yours truly,

S. M.

Baltimore, Md.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Although a new reader of your magazine, I enjoy it immensely. I enjoy especially the stories dealing with the tropics and the West. I have a few suggestions: Several authors lately have written stories in which they show a lack of acquaintance with some parts of this continent, and especially of that portion bordering on to Mexico. Edmond Lawrence, in his novel "Jungle Intrigue," has this defect. I am from Texas, and have lived there all my life. So far I have not seen a native Texan who could *not* speak Spanish, and never yet have I found one who was afraid of the devil himself, if I do have to say it.

One other suggestion: Why not have a story with the scene of the plot laid in Texas, say San Antonio? There is abundant material there for hundreds of corking good stories.

"Under the Whip" is one of the best novels I have read in a "coon's age."

I hope the others will continue to be as interesting.

"With Sword and Spur" was very interesting, and of a type I like. With best wishes for TOP-NOTCH and its editor, I am, truly yours,

TEX.

Philadelphia, Pa.



FROM Newark, New Jersey, we have this, the writer being O. F. Hevener, of Fourth Street, that city:

About the first thing I turn to when I pick up T.-N. is the "Talks." Letters seem to come from all parts of the United States, yet I have not seen more than one from Newark—that large city that is so near to the home of T.-N., too!

There is something about TOP-NOTCH that is different from other magazines, and I am sure most of your readers will agree with me there. I have none of your authors to find fault with. The animal stories by Harold de Polo are great. Stories written by yourself, Fitzgerald, R. A. Phillips, Bertram Lebar, Albert M. Treynor, and the writer of

the Silas Q. Pinch stories are always good. Summed up, TOP-NOTCH is an all-around fine magazine.

The only thing is, I don't see where we are getting more reading now for fifteen cents than when we paid ten.

It is just this task of keeping TOP-NOTCH "different," as our correspondent says it is, that demands a different kind of publisher. As to the volume of reading matter supplied now, as contrasted with what was given at the old price, it can be seen easily that it has been increased. If any reader will count the number of pages in the last of the ten-cent issues, he will see that in the fifteen-cent form many pages have been added.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Kindly excuse me for taking up your time, but I could not resist the temptation of congratulating you. There never was, isn't now, or never will be any periodical to come within a mile of TOP-NOTCH.

It's about time we got a "Boltwood of Yale" serial again. No knocks to authors. They are all good, and it's a long, long way to find a better combination. Hoping I have not taken too much of your time, I am,

F. G. KNIPFER.

Middletown, Conn.

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: As I am a reader of your excellent magazine, and have been for about three years, I thought I would write you, and let you know you had a lot of admirers here in Ottawa, although we don't see many letters from these parts. You will no doubt be interested to learn that I have sent fifty back numbers of TOP-NOTCH to England for the convalescing soldiers at the hospitals there, as they were too good to keep idle when others needed them more than I did.

TOP-NOTCH, to my mind is absolutely the best fiction magazine going to-day, and I ought to know magazines, as I have run a bookstore here in the city a couple of years, and have carried over one hundred different magazines; but the only one I look forward to arriving for my own perusal is TOP-NOTCH, and, believe me, I have to grab a copy quick or they will all be gone.

I certainly wish you and all your writers the best of success and prosperity. Yours for good reading with the punch in it.

R. B. WHALLEY.

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.



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